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# VOICES





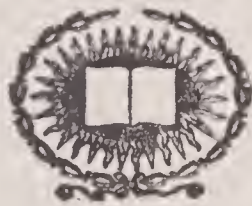






# VOICES

BY  
GEORGE J. BRENN



*New York & London*  
THE CENTURY CO.

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To  
“BOB” (R. H.) DAVIS





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# VOICES





# VOICES

## CHAPTER I

### VOCAL TERRORS

“CALL it idle curiosity—anything you will—but I want to know why Warren Willmer has discontinued telephone service at his home in the city and at his country place at Westbury. I want to know why he refuses to answer the telephone at his Broadway office.”

F. H. Reeves, president of the telephone company, regarded Inspector Corson of the police department shrewdly.

“Are you sure of your facts?” he countered.

“Absolutely, Mr. Reeves,” replied the inspector. “I’ve tried to get him at all three places.”

“Why?” quizzed Reeves.

“Because I’ve heard rumors of strange occurrences, matters which should properly be

brought to the attention of my department. In my opinion, Mr. Reeves, you'll be doing Willmer a real kindness if you tell me what you know."

Reeves appeared to be impressed by Corson's earnest manner.

"I'll tell you, gladly, inspector," he agreed. "Willmer came in here about a week ago, very much agitated, and apparently laboring under some great strain. He announced that he wished to cancel his contracts for telephone service at his home on the Drive and at his place at Westbury. I immediately concluded that he had some ulterior motive in visiting me, since the small matter he brought to my attention was one that might properly be handled by a letter or telephone call to any of our local offices. In an effort to draw him out I asked what his reasons were for objecting to telephone service. He was stubborn and refused to divulge them. While we were talking this telephone on my desk rang.

"'If that call is for me, say I've just left here,' he begged, as I lifted the receiver. Sure enough it was, and I did as he directed. He was very much upset.

“‘Man or woman?’ he inquired.

“‘Man,’ I answered. ‘Sounded like an Italian.’

“‘My God!’ he muttered, and buried his face in his arms, right here at the desk. In a few minutes he pulled himself together.

“‘Rip out the equipment!’ he ordered. ‘Every wire and every instrument!’

“I expostulated with him, stating that a man of his position could not afford to isolate himself by dispensing with the telephone. He was obdurate, however, and refused to rescind his order; so last night we discontinued his service at the central office. We have not yet removed the somewhat elaborate equipment from his premises.”

Corson nodded.

“Is n’t it strange,” he reflected, “that a man of Willmer’s type, a man with thirty years of business experience and the ability to accumulate millions, should take action of this kind and at the same time surround the affair with mystery? What is your personal opinion, Mr. Reeves?”

Reeves hesitated, then opened a humidor and offered Corson a cigar. The latter



waved it away impatiently, with a word of thanks.

"I have n't a very pronounced opinion," observed Reeves. "Willmer is a man of unusual intelligence, and his actions in this matter are decidedly mystifying. He is stubbornly silent on the reason for his aversion to the telephone, but his attitude and my previous acquaintance with him lead me to believe his reason is a good one. Still, it is possible that overwork or worry have wrought havoc with his mentality and nervous system, and a temporary aberration may have resulted."

"You are acquainted with him, then?"

"In a casual way—yes. We are both members of the Ibis Club. Willmer maintains a suite there, but until recently he has rarely spent a night in his room. Night before last I was somewhat amused to hear him order the steward to have the extension telephone in his room removed, as he contemplated staying overnight and did not wish to be disturbed."

"He's not married, I believe?"

"He's not. He's about fifty years of age and a self-made man. Was once a newsboy. Now he's one of the triumvirate. He and Otis King and Pendleton Kirke collectively

are figures in international finance. Foreign powers are their clients. If he is deranged and incompetent I shudder to think of the consequences. His associates are by no means brilliant financiers."

"Could he be influenced by them?"

"I doubt it," responded Reeves dubiously. "He usually dominates the other two."

There was a long silence, finally broken by Corson.

"By the way," he observed, "you mentioned an Italian telephoning here for Willmer on the occasion of his visit. What did the fellow say when you told him Willmer had left?"

"He said, 'That's a lie!' and hung up immediately."

Corson nodded knowingly.

"I'll turn Fornaro loose on the case," he announced. "If it's Black Hand stuff, Pietro will get the answer!"

"I had an idea it might be something of the sort," commented Reeves. "Why don't you interview Willmer?"

"I'm going to. Perhaps I'll manage to get him talking."

"When will you see him?" asked Reeves.

"At once."

The telephone on Reeves's desk rang sharply, and the president answered its summons.

"Show him in," he directed, and replaced the receiver. Then he turned to Corson.

"Willmer is outside," he announced. "He wants to see me immediately."

Warren Willmer was shown into the room by Reeves's secretary. Willmer bulked large and carried his fifty years lightly. He was smooth-shaven, his complexion was somewhat pale but clear, and there were few lines in his countenance. All of his features were large, and a caricaturist would have been puzzled to fix upon the predominating one. His forehead was unusually high, his chin unusually square, his eyes clear and unusually blue. The perfect cut of his business suit revealed a soldierly bearing, and his general appearance suggested latent physical strength.

Willmer looked from Reeves to Corson inquiringly.

"I thought you were alone," he remarked in a monotone that invited Corson's dismissal.

"This is Inspector Corson of the police department," introduced Reeves.

"How do? I'll see you after Corson goes, Reeves." He turned on his heel as if to quit the room.

"One moment, Mr. Willmer." Corson's tone was sufficiently sharp to bring the financier back. "I was just on my way to your office. This little affair—"

"Is ended," concluded Willmer finally. "If you're leaving, good day."

"If you've been annoyed—if it's Black Hand stuff or—"

"It is n't," snapped Willmer. "If it was, it would be none of your business."

Corson shrugged his shoulders.

"Good day, Mr. Reeves. And good afternoon, Mr. Willmer. Sooner or later you will call on me, and when you do I shall teach you a lesson in courtesy."

The inspector withdrew in anger, and Willmer entirely ignored his parting prediction.

"About that telephone service, Reeves," he began in a casual manner that failed to impress the telephone man, "I find that your men were right. I simply can't do without telephones, and I want service restored to-



night. I m afraid I did n't give the matter enough thought."

"You did n't," responded Reeves succinctly. "Some years ago Theodore N. Vail undertook to advertise the telephone to show how it could be used instead of a letter, or a telegram, or a personal call, or a trip to another city. One of the directors of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company told Vail that the money should not be spent for advertising but for dividends. He held that advertising was unnecessary because everybody knew about the telephone. Do you know what Vail told him?"

"No," acknowledged Willmer.

"Vail said: 'Yes, everybody knows about the telephone, but, damn it, they don't think about it enough. If I can make them think about it oftener, they 'll use it oftener.' "

Willmer nodded agreement.

"Good dope," he acquiesced. "Great man, Vail. Knew him pretty well. Will you have that service restored to-night?"

"To be sure. I presume—"

The telephone on Reeves's desk rang.

"It's for you," announced Reeves. "Miss

Carewe, your secretary, wishes to speak to you."

Willmer accepted the instrument hesitatingly, as if he were afraid of it.

"Yes?" he greeted questioningly. He listened for about a minute and then banged the receiver on the hook. When he faced Reeves again he was shaking with anger or fear, and his countenance was horribly distorted.

"That's what I mean!" he exploded, banging the desk. "That was n't my secretary! It was a man. Sounded like a very old man. It's got to be stopped, do you hear? Those damned voices are killing me, and you people must do something about it!"

The suave Mr. Reeves regarded Willmer inquiringly. The financier was white and shaking like an aspen.

"Come, calm yourself, Mr. Willmer," counseled Reeves. "If I'm to do anything for you I must have further facts. A moment ago you requested me to have your telephone service restored at your office. I presume that you wish to have it restored at your residence in the city and in Westbury as well. Is that right?"

"Absolutely, if you'll agree to eliminate the annoyances to which I've been subjected."

"I can't agree to anything unless I know the facts. What is wrong, Mr. Willmer?"

The financier silently stared at Reeves, as if measuring his man. His face plainly indicated when he had arrived at a decision.

"I'll tell you all that I may, Reeves," he announced in a somewhat conciliatory manner. "This, of course, is strictly confidential. I would be a blockhead, indeed, if I didn't realize the advantages of using the telephone. It's the greatest time and money saver in civilized life to-day. For years I've transacted most of my business by telephone. It has kept me in touch with my agents and associates, regardless of local conditions or distance. The telephone has become the welder of a nation; it has made the continent a community."

"Great phrase, that last," beamed Reeves, scribbling on a pad. "Welder of a nation! The continent a community! That will make a fine advertisement. Beg your pardon; pray continue!"

"I've never believed in making exclusiveness a fetish," resumed Willmer. "My

office door is always open to any of my associates, employees, or clients. In the same manner I've been easily accessible by telephone. Only infrequently have I been too busy to talk to any one who called me. Answering my own telephone has become a habit with me and it's a damned hard habit to break."

"It's too good a habit to break," smiled Reeves.

"I agree with you, but I've reached the point where I must either break the habit or it will break me!"

"Why?" The telephone man did not attempt to conceal his interest.

"The voices!" responded Willmer, his voice dropping to an impressive whisper. "I've reached the point where I don't dare look at one of your shining black instruments. I've been harassed, day and night, by a gang of—of, oh, I don't know what to call them! No matter where I go, if there's a telephone about, they seek me. If I answer, it's always the same. There's any number of them at work—old men and old women, young men and young women, Irishmen, Frenchmen, Italians, Chinese! They're try-



ing to bleed me; it's extortion, it's robbery, it's blackmail!"

He had gradually raised his voice in an increasing crescendo that brought his fist down on the desk with the word "blackmail," and Reeves involuntarily sat erect with a jerk.

"I assume that your reference to the various members of this gang, their ages, sex, and nationalities, is based on your telephone conversations with them? You haven't seen any of them?"

"Of course not. If I had the slightest clue to the identity to just one of them I would have something tangible on which to work. But the mystery, the strange voices, the unearthly hours, are wearing me out. My nerves are fairly on edge. When I hear a telephone bell ring I feel like crying out! I've lost all restraint!"

"Tell me this, Mr. Willmer. How long has this continued?"

"About a month. I feel that I'm watched all the time. No matter where I go, the gang seems to reach me. They follow my movements with unerring precision. During the last two weeks I haven't taken a receiver off the hook to answer a call. Miss Carewe



or my stenographer has answered for me and, if convinced that the call is a legitimate one, has turned it over to me. Even that has n't worked. They are acquainted with details of my business; they give the names of my friends and associates as their own. You saw—just now. Some one called and claimed to be Miss Carewe; but, when I answered, it was a man who talked!”

“Why don't you leave town for a bit?” suggested Reeves. “Take a little vacation.”

“For three reasons,” thundered Willmer impatiently and without hesitation. “In the first place, they'd find me no matter where I went. In the second place, I never ran away from a fight yet, and I don't like to admit defeat. And, finally, I'm in the midst of a colossal financiering plan involving the bonded debts of half the major capitals of Europe, and my presence right here in New York is absolutely essential.”

“May I inquire as to the nature of the messages you receive by telephone from this gang?” asked Reeves.

“You may like hell!” retorted Willmer. “I've told you all I'll tell any one. It's entirely a matter of principle; I simply refuse to

be browbeaten, intimidated, or bled. But I do demand that you people put a stop to the use of the telephone for this nefarious purpose. Now, then—what do you propose doing?”

Reeves was apparently perplexed. He was genuinely eager to relieve the situation, but was helpless, and disliked the idea of acknowledging it.

“It is extremely unfortunate,” he began, apologetically, “but the telephone is like the sun that shines alike upon the just and the unjust, and like the rain that falls equally upon the evil and the good. It stands ready to serve all mankind, without regard to nationality, language, or morals. It is the greatest of democrats and most absolute of cosmopolites.

“If enemies of society choose to use it, we are in no position to forbid it. It is a marvelous mechanism, so delicate that it is operated by the slightest sound. The slight vibration of the vocal cords is actually the power that puts it in operation. We have no means of searching the souls of our subscribers or patrons. We have no means of determining

their purposes or motives. How then are we to act? How *can* we assist you?"

"I don't give a damn how you do it!" barked Willmer. "You know your business, and I know mine. There must be certain things you people can do; wire tapping, and that sort of thing, I mean. If you get the answer, bring it to me; I don't want any publicity. If I did I could tell my story to Corson or give it to a private detective."

Reeves meditated for a few minutes. His face brightened.

"I think I have the answer," he announced. "This affair needs a specialist—an expert. It needs a detective who is a telephone man. I'll call in Charlie Fenwick for you."

"Who is Charlie Fenwick?" demanded the millionaire.

"During working hours Fenwick is a wire-chief for a relatively small company known as the Traders' Telephone Company. We call it a connecting company, because we have an agreement with it regarding the interchange of business. Fenwick is a good man, practically and technically. Outside of working hours he indulges a peculiar hobby, the

detection of crime by telephone. He has been very successful, too; so successful, in fact, that the police in all the large cities know him as the 'phonic criminologist.' He recovered Diamond Jim Ordway's jewels; he solved the problem of Lady Tsai's disappearance; and he has even aided government agents in important cases. Yes, sir; Charlie Fenwick is your man!"

A faint glimmer of awakened hope was newly visible in Willmer's manner.

"You say he does all of his detective work by telephone?" he inquired.

"Absolutely; or, by the 'spoken word,' as he phrases it. He never spends much time on a case, either, and is unusually reliable and discreet."

"You are sure that this paragon of a sleuth is available? There will be no difficulty in obtaining his services?" catechized Willmer.

"None at all," assured Reeves, touching a buzzer button beneath his desk. A young man answered its summons and waited attentively.

"Call up President Hynes of the Traders' Company at Springfield," he directed, "and tell him that I would like to borrow Charlie



Fenwick at once for some important work. Arrange to send him a wire-chief to substitute for Fenwick during his absence. Let me know how soon we can expect him."

"Yes, sir." The young man withdrew.

"I feel sure that your troubles are ended," encouraged Reeves. "Why, Fenwick's the boy that restored the stolen crystal wine-pot to the Kensington Museum. He's a veritable wizard of the wires! I've known of cases where he has seated himself at a telephone and by means of half a dozen calls has successfully solved unusual problems without leaving his desk. No time lost in leg-work, or in running around with a magnifying-glass. And he only a kid, too!"

"How old?" asked Willmer.

"Twenty-one. Been at the telephone game for five years. Red-headed, freckled, and blue-eyed, but a little gentleman, and well read. He's actually a big man in Springfield, but he's entirely unspoiled and is endowed with all the pep and enthusiasm of youth. You'll like him."

"After—not before!" commented Willmer grimly. "I've seen too many boy wonder bubbles explode!"



The young man reëntered Reeves's office.

"Mr. Hynes says that Fenwick will be here at ten to-morrow morning. An assistant named Boyden is leaving now, and will see you this afternoon to get the facts and do such preliminary work as may be necessary."

"Good," ejaculated Reeves, dismissing his employee. "This fellow Boyden is a sort of trouble-shooter who works for Fenwick, and I understand that he has assisted him occasionally in recent cases. With those two men on the job I can safely venture the prediction that your desperados will soon be in the clutches of the law!"

"That's not what I want," objected Willmer, as he made for the door. "I'm not so keen about catching them; I just want him to shut up those everlasting voices!"

## CHAPTER II

### THE TROUBLE-SHOOTER

**S**ETH BOYDEN entered the terminal room at Springfield, chuckling silently.

He was a thin wisp of a man, weighing not much more than a hundred pounds. Despite his sixty years, he gave a decided impression of agility, and his gray eyes held a semi-humorous expression that made one wonder if he was ever serious.

"Want to see me, boss?" he inquired, approaching the wire-chief's desk, at which Fenwick had just completed the testing of a new line.

"I do," responded Fenwick. He glanced up at his aged but dependable trouble-shooter. "Why all the merriment?" he demanded.

"Gosh, 't was funny!" cackled Boyden, stirred anew by the reminder. "I found a break in the River City toll-line, jest about where you measured it to be, and fixed it up. Well, sir, those women down along the creek

are always beggin' me for wire, so 's they kin use it for clothes-line. Guess I made a mistake when I give some to Mrs. Dobson that time. I jest about got through to-day and was packin' my tool kit away in the flivver when Mrs. Olsen bobs up.

"‘Say, Mr. Boyden,’ sez she, roundabout like, ‘will you tell me whut kind of wire is good for clothes-line?’

"‘Y’ see, she did n’t want to ask me for it outright. ‘Sure kin,’ I answers. ‘Nothin’ better ’n barbed wire; *ye don’t have to use no clothes-pins!*’"

Fenwick laughed heartily, and his assistant shook with repressed merriment.

"‘Gosh, ye should ’a’ seen her face!’" he continued, and sobered almost instantly as he detected a dawning impatience in the wire-chief’s keen blue eyes.

"‘Seth,’ announced Charlie impressively, "‘your dream has come true. You ’ve always wanted to assist me in a big out-of-town case. You ’re going to New York right away.’"

"‘Me! N’York!’" gasped the old fellow incredulously. "‘Ye can’t mean it!’"

"‘But I do,’" smiled Fenwick. "‘We ’ve never been able to get away together before,

but this time Mr. Reeves is going to send a wire-chief in from the big city to run things while we are away. It will be nice to spend a couple of days in New York again."

"It sure will," affirmed Boyden enthusiastically. "When do we start?"

"You will leave at once. I'm not supposed to get there until ten o'clock to-morrow morning, but if my substitute arrives pretty soon I may be able to take the late train to-night. I'm relying on you, Seth, to do a whole lot of work before I get there."

"I'll do my durnedest!" promised the trouble-shooter. "Whut's the case? murder?"

"No—blackmail," advised Fenwick.

Boyden's disappointment was more than evident.

"Gosh, we ain't never had a murder case yet!" he complained.

"Perhaps we will some day," encouraged Fenwick, amused. "In the meantime we're going to mingle in society. I'm going to send you to the home of Warren Willmer."

"Charlie," declared his assistant, "if you're gonna do that, I warn you that I'm takin' along my church-deacon coat!"

"That will be very appropriate, I'm sure,"



agreed the younger man. "Now, listen. Mr. Reeves arranged with Mr. Hynes to have me take this case. Hynes readily agreed when I asked if you might accompany me. The case appears to be very simple, although it isn't fair to judge until you have first-hand information. I've telephoned the people in New York and have obtained some sketchy facts. Willmer is about the wealthiest man in New York. Some blackmailing gang has been at work, calling him on the telephone at all hours of the day and night, and worrying him.

"He's reached the point where he can't look at a telephone instrument. Reeves has told him that we will round up the gang. I want you to go to Mr. Reeves's office as soon as you reach New York. His secretary will turn you over to a man who will answer any questions and produce any records you require. A simple examination of the billing-records and toll-tickets may tell the whole story."

"I won't have a chanst to get much information before closing-time," reminded Boyden.

"You'll have a couple of hours. Do what you can. After you have your supper



I want you to call on Warren Willmer. I have n't the slightest idea of what he's like, so you'll have to study him. Get as much information out of him as you can without talking."

Seth Boyden nodded. "As it says in the first book of James, nineteenth verse, 'Let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak.' I'll pump him."

"Seth," smiled his young superior, "you are going to be a treat to New York. You'll be the first Scripture-quoting telephone man they've ever encountered. I venture the prediction that you will be a puzzle to the metropolitan telephone people, crooks, and financiers."

"Remember, I expect a good job. When I reach New York I'll be tickled to death if you have the case entirely completed. If you have n't, the least I'll expect will be a whole package of assorted clues."

"You'll get 'em," promised Boyden resolutely. "What hotel do I stay at?"

"Go to the Commodore. I've made reservations for both of us. Miss Garrison, in the commercial office, will give you an advance for expenses. Pack up right away and make

the next train. Oh—one other thing: don't tell a soul that I may reach the city before morning. Furthermore, I'd like you to arrange with Mr. Willmer to have me introduced to his associates as John Bell. There may be telephone people involved in this case, and I'd prefer not to be known for a while. Good luck to you."

The old man departed on his mission with the ardor of a school-boy on a holiday. This spirit was intensified rather than diminished when he reached the executive offices of the telephone company in New York. Reeves was somewhat amused at the frock-coated, white-haired little man, but at the end of a short interview was inclined to respect Boyden's knowledge of the business.

The old fellow requested the privilege of examining specific records of the various departments, and was so thorough and methodical in his perusal of them that it was very evident that his association with the young phonic criminologist had acquainted him with the latter's methods.

At eight o'clock that evening Seth pounded vigorously at the antique knocker on the door of Warren Willmer's home on Riverside

Drive. The man who answered his summons was not agreeably impressed by the visitor's somewhat funereal appearance, considerably aggravated as it was by a tiny white lawn tie and a wide expanse of shirt-bosom.

"I 'm Mr. Seth Boyden," he announced. "I want to see Mr. Willmer."

"Mr. Willmer cannot be disturbed," advised the unemotional Riggs.

"'Cept by me," retorted the little man.

"By no one, sir. Standing order, sir, for over a week."

"In the words of the fourth chapter and fifth verse o' Proverbs, 'Forget it!' Mr. Willmer sent to Springfield for me. I 'm here by appointment."

"I *beg* your pardon, sir. Pray be seated."

Somewhat doubtfully Riggs withdrew. Boyden's eyes darted about, taking in every detail of the spacious reception-hall, the broad circular stairway, and the sumptuous furnishings.

Riggs returned to the foot of the stairs, and in his precise manner announced: "Mr. Willmer will see you, sir, in his den. This way, if you please."

Retaining possession of a small tan leather

bag of doubtful appearance, Boyden permitted Riggs to usher him into Willmer's presence. The financier was seated before an open fireplace, in the grate of which a fire of cannel-coal smoldered. He nodded to Boyden.

"Evening. Find a chair. More light, Riggs."

Riggs snapped on the lights and withdrew. The two men regarded each other appraisingly. Boyden was keen in his scrutiny. Willmer appeared less so and was apparently weary.

"What time did you get in?" asked Willmer.

"Three o'clock. I've seen Mr. Reeves, and since then I've been investigatin'."

"Great Cæsar! What?"

"Kind of telephone equipment in this here palace o' yours and in your home in Westbury, for one thing. Then I've been tryin' to find out the names o' people who telephone you f'm out of town. In other words, I'm tryin' to clear the tracks for Charlie Fenwick."

Willmer smiled indulgently.

"Looks like action," he conceded. "The



telephone people seem to have a high regard for Fenwick."

"They should, Mr. Willmer. That boy is a wonder. He jest tangles crooks up in a mesh of copper wire. Why, he kin purty near tell what a man looks like jest from hearin' his voice over the telephone."

"H-m. We shall see. Reeves says the same thing. I put it up to Reeves pretty stiff; just passed the buck entirely to him and told him he would have to stop all that damned funny business over my telephone. Of course, it is n't the fault of the telephone company, but Reeves fell for it and used his good offices to get Fenwick for me."

"You were only follerin' Scripture when you went to him. In the sixty-eighth Psalm, the thirtieth verse, it sez, 'Rebuke the company.' That 's what you did."

Willmer chuckled. "I hardly expected to find the telephone company in the Bible," he observed.

"The Good Book is full o' references to the telephone," advised Boyden in a manner that made Willmer stare. "F'r instance, the nineteenth Psalm, fourth verse, is a purty good description of the hull Bell system. It reads,



'Their line is gone out to all the earth and their words to the end o' the world.' "

"I 'll have to look it up some time and see if you 're stringing me," smiled Willmer. "But I like a man with a sense of humor. Let's get to work. Is there anything you want to ask me?"

"Only one thing, and you won't answer that."

"What?" inquired Willmer.

"Mr. Reeves told me all he knew about the case. The most important thing he did n't know. I mean by that, the kind o' messages you receive over the telephone."

The millionaire stiffened in his chair and his cordial manner vanished.

"If I have my way, you never *will* know," he observed grimly. "It does n't matter, anyway. I don't want to discuss the messages; I want to eliminate them."

"Very well, sir," answered Boyden simply. "You 're jest makin' it a little harder, and it 'll take Mr. Fenwick a bit longer to clear things up."

"How much longer?"

"Oh, mebbe half a day!"

“Great Cæsar! Does he work as fast as that?”

Boyden nodded. “Know what he said, Mr. Willmer, when he sent me here? He said: ‘I’ll take the first train in the mornin’. It’ll be nice to spend a couple o’ days in New York again.’ Yes, sir; that’s what he said—a couple o’ days.”

Willmer subjected Boyden to a searching scrutiny.

“Believe him do you?” he asked.

The little man nodded.

“Good enough. I’m beginning to feel the same way myself. Now, aside from the one thing we’ve already discussed and definitely disposed of, what else would you like to know?”

Boyden opened his leather bag, removed some yellow sheets of paper, and spread them out on a table.

“I understand you don’t know where any of these spooky calls come from. If they are made from out o’ town, we kin trace ’em.”

“How?” quizzed Willmer.

“By the telephone company’s toll-tickets. The operators in the central offices write a

ticket for every toll-call. It shows the date, the number callin', the number called, the time o' day when connection was established, and the time when the conversation was ended. Those tickets are what we bill the toll-charges from."

"By Jove! That's news. I should say you can trace them. But suppose the calls are made from telephones right here in town? Can't you trace them in the same way?"

"No, sir. They don't write tickets for local messages. When you contract for telephone service you buy a certain number o' local messages per month. The messages are registered automatically as you use 'em. The company finds out whether you have used more messages or less than you are entitled to by readin' the indicator on the automatic register for your telephone."

"Where are these registers?" inquired Willmer.

"In the terminal room of each central office. There is one for every telephone line. So many local calls are made each day that it would slow up the service an' make it almighty expensive if the operators had to write a ticket on every local call,"

"I see," commented Willmer. "How about the toll-calls—how many tickets are written?"

"I reckon your telephone company down here writes about ten to fifteen million a month," answered Seth.

"Great Cæsar! You don't expect to look through them for calls to my telephone, do you?"

"No, sir, I don't. You see, you told Mr. Reeves that the persons annoyin' you seem to have information about everything you do; that, no matter where you go, the voices follow you. That made me think that mebbe some one in your office was in cahoots with this gang on the outside. Now, if that's the case, the telephone would probably be used to let the voices know about your movements. I had a list made up of all out-o'-town telephones called f'm your residences or your office.

"That was easy, 'cause all the tickets charged to each telephone are filed together. Then I investigated to see whether any o' those numbers called you. Some of 'em did, and I've got 'em on another list. For example, I found that calls were made from Bar-



clay 13,000 and from Riverside 11,980 to Boulevard 5381 and to Newton 4987. Then I learned that those Boulevard and Newton subscribers called your telephone numbers purty frequently."

"Boulevard 5381 is Otis King's telephone number," announced Willmer, "and Newton 4987 is Pendleton Kirke's. They are my business associates, and have occasion to call both my office and my home frequently. Of course, we have many calls, both outgoing and incoming, with which I'm not familiar.

"My secretary, Miss Carewe, will be of some assistance to you in checking up these lists and eliminating numbers such as I have just mentioned. I don't want you annoying folks who are above suspicion."

"Nobody is above suspicion," observed Boyden. "I'll be glad to have a talk with your secretary."

"Right away?"

"If I kin," answered Boyden, somewhat surprised.

"Lives here," advised Willmer, pulling a bell-rope at the side of the fireplace. "She is a capable girl, too—daughter of an old friend of mine. He went to smash financially, and



before he died I promised him that I would do the ri—that is, that I would look after her.”

“You rang, sir?” questioned Riggs, who had silently entered the room.

“Yes. Ask Miss Carewe to step in for a moment, if she ’s disengaged.”

“Yes, sir.” The man withdrew.

“While we are waiting,” said Boyden, “I ’d like to suggest that you keep a record of the time at which you receive these queer messages. It may help Mr. Fenwick if he wants to look over toll-tickets later on. Another thing you ought to do is to answer the telephone even if you ’re positive that the feller callin’ you is a member o’ the gang and is tryin’ to annoy you. Keep ’em talkin’, and sooner or later they ’ll give themselves away. Mebbe it will get you a little bit peeved, but it ’ll give Fenwick a better chance to work.”

“Old man,” confided Willmer, “this morning I ’d have turned you down cold on that proposition; to-night I feel that we ’re going to get somewhere. I ’ve got my nerve back. I ’ll go you!”

Riggs reëntered the room, carrying a telephone instrument equipped with a long cord

at the end of which was a plug. He inserted the plug in a jack beneath the table in the center of the room and removed the receiver from the hook.

“Miss Carewe will be here in a moment, sir. She just received this call for you from Mr. Pendleton Kirke. She says she’s sure it is Mr. Pendleton Kirke, sir, and instructed me to transfer the call to this room.”

Willmer waited until Riggs left the room. He then approached the table slowly, extended his hand for the instrument, then drew it back again. His hand trembled.

“It’s another of those voices, Boyden!” he whispered hoarsely. “I can’t—I can’t talk over that ’phone.”

“Shucks!” rebuked Boyden scornfully. “The one hundred and second Psalm, second verse, sez, ‘When I call, answer me speedily.’ A minute ago you said you had your nerve back. Buck up; show me that you really have.”

Willmer squared his shoulders and picked up the receiver. As he did so Boyden dived into the leather bag and abstracted a test-set consisting of a combination receiver and trans-

mitter. He clinched the teeth of his set through the cords of Willmer's telephone and placed the test-set to his ear, standing at the millionaire's side.

"Y-yes," began Willmer weakly. "Yes, this is Willmer, Kirke. . . . You—what! Oh!" He slammed the receiver back on the hook, seized a decanter, poured himself a stiff peg of brandy, and gulped it. Greatly agitated, he turned and beheld Boyden, the receiver again off the hook and the test-set still at his ear.

"Never mind it, operator," advised Boyden. Then he looked ruefully at Willmer.

"The party's gone," he observed. "You have spoiled the hull thing."

"Who in hell told you to listen in?" thundered Willmer.

"No one did, but Fenwick would have done it, and I work for him."

The telephone bell rang, and Boyden immediately lifted the receiver.

"Mr. Willmer's residence," he announced. He listened a moment and then placed the receiver on the table.

"Pendleton Kirke," he informed Willmer.

"It's a different voice than before, and I reckon you'd better answer it."

Reluctantly, hesitatingly, Willmer picked up the receiver.

"Kirke?" he queried. "Yes, yes—I'll be in. You're at the Ibis Club? Very well; come right up. Good-by."

He sighed with relief as he replaced the receiver.

"Kirke and King, my partners, are coming up to see me regarding a matter of importance."

He helped himself to another drink and offered one to Boyden, which the little man declined. Then he fell to pacing the floor.

"You've seen what this does to me, Boyden: takes the starch right out of me. For God's sake, get busy and rid me of the voices!"

"Be patient, and Mr. Fenwick will fix everything up," counseled Boyden. "By the way, sir, he wishes to be known as John Bell to your employees."

"Very well," assented the millionaire gloomily.

The rustle of silk caused him to halt and face the door.



"I was detained for a moment, Mr. Willmer," murmured a pleasing contralto voice. "I 'm sorry."

Boyden bestowed an approving glance at the young lady.

"It 's all right, my dear," Willmer assured her. "Miss Carewe, let me present Mr. Seth Boyden, of the telephone company. He is trying to help us solve our little mystery, and requires the services of my very able secretary."

"Oh, I 'm so glad!" she asserted, giving Boyden's hand a hearty grasp. "I 'll help all I can. It 's such a relief to have Mr. Willmer do anything at all about it. He 's been positively supine!"

"Take Mr. Boyden to the library, Lorraine. He has some lists of telephone numbers he 'd like you to examine. I am expecting Kirke and King at any moment."

"Very well. Come along, Mr. Boyden. I 've always wanted to talk to a telephone man. There are heaps of questions I want to ask."

"Yes 'm. Did you know that the first book of Chronicles, ninth chapter, thirty-



third verse, describes telephone men purty well?"

"No, I did n't. How interesting! What does it say?"

"It says, 'They were employed in that work day and night.' "

## CHAPTER III

### THE TRIUMVIRATE

SHORTLY after Seth Boyden and Lorraine Carewe left Willmer's den Riggs ushered Pendleton Kirke and Otis King into the room. King was immediately struck by the presence of the telephone instrument on the center-table. Advancing to it, he placed his hand on the transmitter cup, and looked at Willmer inquiringly. He was a likable-looking chap of about thirty, tall, slender, and blond, with regular features of no unusual strength. His evening-clothes were essentially a part of him, and he was carelessly, unconsciously graceful. King's attitude arrested Willmer's attention.

"Leave the damn thing alone and sit down," he grunted.

"We're here to see you about that damn thing," observed Kirke.

He was a year or two younger than Willmer, short, squat, and decidedly bald. The

baldness was somewhat accentuated by his extremely heavy eyebrows, which lent his countenance a somewhat shaggy, ferocious appearance. Kirke invariably attempted to live up to this appearance, and such measure of success as he attained in this respect was due to his deep, rasping voice.

"What's the row?" quizzed Willmer when the two were seated.

"The devil's to pay; that's what! A pretty mess you made of it, cutting out your telephone service. The papers have gotten hold of it. Seen them?"

"Yes," assented Willmer wearily. "I suppose I've made myself the laughing-stock of New York."

"Worse than that," retorted Kirke. "Many people are laughing at you, no doubt, but more are feeling sorry for you."

"You mean—"

"I mean that they are thinking you're—insane!" He slapped his knees and glared at his associate. "No need of mincing matters; you might as well know the truth. The Fidelity Trust people advised King this afternoon to go elsewhere for that loan of thirty million dollars. They told him they'd rather

not take chances while you are in your present condition. I just left the Londoners we've been dickering with, and they want to call off all negotiations. The U. V. O. people arranged this afternoon to have the Gates crowd underwrite their new financing. D'ye see what you've done?"

The senior member of Willmer, Kirke & King slumped in his chair, his right hand to his head and over his eyes. He was careworn and silent.

"Well, what are you going to do?" demanded Kirke impatiently.

Warren Willmer's hand dropped to his side.

"What is it you want me to do?" he queried brokenly.

"Restore your telephone service first," barked Kirke.

"I've had that done."

"Next, issue some kind of explanation to the newspapers."

"I'll do that to-morrow. What else?"

"Answer your telephone when people call you."

Willmer sat up in his chair. "I won't," he announced with an air of finality. "Rumored



insanity is bad enough, but I 'm not going to have the rumor become a fact."

Kirke and King exchanged significant glances.

"Look here, old chap," protested King. "Our experience has been that whenever you refuse to answer your telephone the bloomin' voices come after us. We 've been hounded by the beastly things all day. It is n't fair—it is n't. You 've simply got to bear your share of the burden."

"Been bothered to-day, have you?" asked Willmer sympathetically.

"Nine times," advised King.

"About a dozen times for me," growled Kirke.

"What sort of voices?" demanded the senior partner.

"All sorts, as usual," responded Kirke. "They differed. They were old and young, educated and illiterate, refined and ill-mannered, of all nationalities and of both sexes. They followed me from the office to the club, back to the office, and thence to the hotel. I tried to keep them on the wire, to engage them in conversation, but could n't get away with

it. Just as soon as they delivered the usual stereotyped remarks they hung up. No threats or demands were made."

"H-m. Wish I had your phlegmatic disposition," yearned Willmer. "I'd answer my telephone, too."

"Rot!" exclaimed Kirke. "I'm not phlegmatic. If any member of this trio has apoplectic tendencies, I'm the one. The only difference is that I've got nerve, and you have n't."

Willmer chuckled.

"Who had nerve in the old days?" he reminded. "Who used to be afraid, and beg me to go slow when I suggested a big proposition? Who made the triumvirate the big financial power it is to-day? Don't *you* talk to me about nerve! It is n't a question of nerve at all; it's a question of imagination. Look at young Otis here. He is n't disturbed at all. Why? Because he has no imagination to speak of. Tell us what *you* do, Otis, when the voices call."

The young man stretched languidly and smiled.

"I've adopted a sort of formula," he ex-

plained rapidly. "As soon as I've determined it's one of these secret society calls I tell the fellow on the other end to go to Hades."

He grinned reminiscently.

"It's a bit awkward at times. To-day, for instance, I consigned to the warm regions the rector of St. Paul's when he called me about the meeting of the church trustees. He was quite taken aback, I assure you.

"The beastly voices don't bother me much, you know. As a matter of fact, I rather enjoy these shivery, mysterious visitations. Of course, I'd like to know why they always say the same thing, and what it means. I've more than half an idea that you two chaps know but won't say. How about it?"

"Nothing of the kind," blustered Kirke indignantly.

"I should say not," denied Willmer.

"That being the case," announced King carelessly, "I'm going to put the whole affair in Inspector Corson's hands to-morrow."

"For heaven's sake, don't!" implored Willmer, jumping to his feet and again pacing the floor. "Don't have any more publicity about this affair than is necessary."

"It seems to me that you are the champion space-grabber, so far as publicity is concerned," reminded King.

"Be guided by us in this, my boy," counseled Kirke. "Your father would do just as we are doing."

"Of course, I'm only a member of the triumvirate by virtue of inheritance," began the young man. "I'm not so sure, though, that father would have acted as you are doing. It was his desire that I take his place after his death and learn the methods of his two associates.

"Father was n't a fool, nor a knave, nor a coward, thank God. I've often heard him use the phrase 'pitiless publicity.' That, it seems to me, is the medicine that will cure our ills.

"This little two-by-four melodrama is n't worrying me. To me the significant thing is that two able-bodied men are afraid of it, and as a result the firm of Willmer, Kirke & King is losing prestige, power, and profits. I don't want to see the name and business that father helped to build up swept away. If you're afraid of the police, give the case to a private detective agency."



Kirke was about to speak, but Willmer interrupted him.

“Wait, Pendleton,” he requested. “Otis, you are still learning the details of our business. You have progressed rapidly, and in time will assuredly take your father’s place in a fitting manner. Kirke and I are as zealous as you of the reputation of our firm. We’re not going to gamble it away on a whim or because of frazzled nerves.

“You are young, however, and inexperienced. Our business is a peculiar one, international in its scope, and you have not yet been initiated into all of its ramifications. Even a little two-by-four melodrama may have startling significance.

“I will grant that I made a serious mistake in cutting out my telephone service and refusing to answer my office ’phone. That has been corrected, however, and will be a nine days’ wonder. The newspapers will soon be referring to it as another of my eccentricities—one of the foibles of wealth.

“But I have n’t entirely overlooked the matters to which you have called attention. For one thing, I’ve engaged a detective.”

“What?” shouted Kirke excitedly. Then he asked, more calmly, “Who?”

“His name,” advised Willmer, pausing for effect, “is Charlie Fenwick.”

“Never heard of him,” murmured Kirke.

“I have,” said King, his face brightening. “He’s that youngster at Springfield—that telephone man. The police call him the phonic criminologist. I say, Willmer, that *was* clever of you—getting Fenwick, I mean. His specialty is the use of the telephone in detecting criminals. A case like this should put him on his mettle. I’ll wager that in a couple of weeks our mystery will be solved.”

“Mr. Fenwick’s assistant, Seth Boyden, is in the library now with Lorraine. He tells me that Fenwick contemplates spending forty-eight hours on the case. Boyden is quite a character, too. He’s an old fellow, appears to be well educated and well read, and is for ever quoting verses from the Bible, which he claims refers specifically to the telephone.

“From what I learn from Reeves, of the telephone company, Boyden is a sort of outside assistant to Fenwick; a trouble-shooter, they call him. He has been offered advancement by the company on a number of occa-

sions, but refuses it because he fairly worships his young superior. He knows Fenwick's methods and is here to relieve him of the detail work."

"Has he accomplished anything?" asked Kirke.

"He has impressed me as being thorough, logical, and energetic. As for results, it's a bit early to expect them. If Fenwick is better than Boyden, I should say that the chances of success are good. The best thing about this arrangement is that it does not cost us a penny. Reeves is supplying Fenwick free of charge."

"You'll never change, sir," observed Otis King dryly. "Some day I'm going to teach you how to part with a dollar without a stabbing pain where your heart is supposed to be. The secret is out; Fenwick is on the case because you don't have to pay him. I suppose you bulldozed the telephone people into that arrangement?"

"It was entirely their suggestion," advised Willmer aggrievedly.

"It was a mighty good one, at any rate," conceded King. "I'm going to run along now to see Lor—Miss Carewe. Then I'm off



for Forest Hills. Oh, by the way, I forgot to mention that I'm off to-morrow for a bit of gunning. Don't know how long I'll be away. Nothing important in the works, so it does n't matter. Besides," with a smile, "I realize that I'm not indispensable to Willmer, Kirke & King. Good night."

"Just a moment, Otis," requested Willmer. "Fenwick may want to see you to-morrow. Where are you going on this hunting trip?"

"I really don't care to say," returned the young man nonchalantly.

"Look here, Otis," protested Kirke, "I don't think you're playing fair. Warren refuses to answer his telephone, and now you're going away. That means that those infernal voices are going to concentrate on me."

"Precisely my idea," declared King. "As I said before, I think you two know more than you care to say. I leave the voices to you, to Mr. Warren Willmer, and to Charlie Fenwick. Good night."

He turned on his heel and left the room.

"Was it wise, Warren?" queried Kirke, as soon as King disappeared. "Was it wise to call in this fellow Fenwick?"

"I had to do something, Pen," defended



Willmer. "I could n't stand that thing any longer. Reeves assures me that Fenwick is discretion itself—that there will be no publicity. My understanding with him is that Fenwick undertakes the job of silencing the voices without asking for any further facts than those I have placed at his disposal. I have n't even told what the voices say, and I have no intention of advising him of what we know or suspect."

"He can't work intelligently without knowing those things," objected Kirke. "Sooner or later he 'll learn them himself."

"We 'll have to take that chance," argued the other. "If he 's the wizard they claim he is, he may really do something for us without inquiring too closely into motives. Have you any new ideas as to who is behind the scheme?"

"None," admitted Kirke. "I 've lain awake nights trying to think of some one who might direct such a gang, and who might have obtained the—the information. My memory is good, and I can't for the life of me recall any one who might *know*. The thing is so mysterious that I sometimes think it would be best to give in, to do whatever *they* require, and bring the farce to an end?"

"Nonsense," scoffed Willmer indignantly. "A gigantic sum is involved, for one thing, and I won't be a victim of blackmail, for another. I'll die first!"

"Perhaps you will," responded Kirke in a manner so significant that Willmer actually shivered. "It's not principle or physical courage that supports you; it's your love of money. Otis King has that feature of it sized up pretty shrewdly."

"Do you think he suspects anything?"

"Of course he does, but he's absolutely puzzled. I'm rather glad he's going away. A good detective could pump him dry in five minutes. Perhaps Fenwick will have the thing cleared up before he returns."

"I hope so," murmured Willmer sincerely.

"It must be," declared his associate positively. "The people at the office know that something is wrong, and some ugly rumors are rife among them, despite our efforts to maintain absolute secrecy."

"If young King would only do as we expect, it would take care of the other phase of the matter and probably relieve the entire situation," hazarded Willmer.

"No use figuring on that," frowned Kirke.

"I'd just as soon make the necessary settlement immediately if it would not be a sort of tacit admission of wrong-doing. I'm perfectly willing to assume a share of the responsibility, but as a matter of fact it should be yours alone."

Willmer chose to ignore the statement and made no denial.

"The voices are not those of honest people," continued the other. "They are the voices of crooks, of blackmailers. They are not interested in having us do the right thing, but if we do the right thing we will be fooling them. What do you think?"

"I'll not consider the proposition for a minute," returned Willmer.

"Are n't you afraid not to?"

The financier nodded affirmatively, and then smiled vacuously before placing his hand in his hip-pocket. He withdrew an automatic revolver.

"I am afraid," he announced—"afraid of physical violence. That's why I bought this. Do you carry one?"

Kirke appeared to be disturbed as his eyes dwelled on the revolver.

"You do take things seriously, don't you?"

he muttered. "No, I don't go about armed. I have an old revolver at home, but it is n't even loaded. Perhaps I'd better fix it up."

"I think you'd better," encouraged Willmer. He pulled open a drawer in the table and extracted a box of cartridges. "Take these," he offered. "I've got more. I dare say you haven't any for that old gun of yours."

Kirke accepted them gingerly and placed the box in his coat-pocket.

"Perhaps they'll fit," he murmured, half ashamed. "I don't even recall the caliber of my weapon."

"If they don't, take my advice and buy an automatic like this, the first thing in the morning."

His partner nodded and consulted his watch.

"It's ten o'clock," he announced. "I must be getting back to Newton. I'll see you and Charlie Fenwick at the office to-morrow."

"When you see Charlie Fenwick his name will be John Bell," advised Willmer. "Good night, Pendleton."



## CHAPTER IV

### FOUR MINUTES OF DARKNESS

**A**S Pendleton Kirke entered his luxurious home in Newton an obsequious male servant hastened to his side to assist him in removing his coat. "A gentleman by the name of Mr. John Bell has been waiting for some time," advised the servant. "I told him I had no idea when you might return, but he stated that his business was important and he insisted upon waiting."

"Where is he, Peters?" demanded Kirke."

"In the blue room, sir."

"Very well. Tell him I'll see him in a moment. Mr. King drove me in from town and is waiting outside for some papers."

"Yes, sir."

Kirke strode toward a door at the right of the reception-hall. With his hand on the knob he paused.

"Oh—Peters?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you happen to know what has become of that old revolver of mine?"

The man's eyebrows arched inquiringly, but only for a second.

"Yes, sir; it's in an old trunk in the storage-room, sir."

"Clean it and let me have it. First thing in the morning will do."

"Yes, sir."

Peters bowed scarcely perceptibly and silently entered the room at the left of the reception-hall as Kirke entered the one to the right.

A clean-cut young man with hair of a distinctly reddish tint and freckles of rather undue prominence was seated in a fireside chair, smoking and perusing a magazine.

"Mr. Kirke will see you in a moment, Mr. Bell. His partner is outside in his car, waiting for some papers which Mr. Kirke is fetching from his study across the hall."

"Which partner—Willmer or King?" inquired the young man, laying aside his magazine.

"Mr. King, sir."

"That's a bit of luck. I wonder if Mr.

Kirke would object if I asked Mr. King in for a moment? It's a matter of importance."

"I'm sure he would not, sir. I'll tell Mr. King."

Peters withdrew, and in a few moments the junior member of the firm entered briskly. His tall, slender form was enveloped in a long motoring-coat, and he wore a cap and carried a pair of gantlets.

"My word! Fenwick!" he shouted, extending a hand with boyish enthusiasm.

Fenwick bit his lip with vexation and directed a significant glance towards Peters, who was closing the front door.

The servant, his countenance immobile and his voice soft, entered the room.

"If you please, gentlemen," he said, "I am going to the top of the house to the storage-room to look for something that Mr. Kirke requires in the morning. Should you need me, please ring the bell." He wheeled about and ascended the stairs.

"It can't be helped, Mr. King," smiled Fenwick, amused at the young millionaire's crestfallen appearance. "I did wish to main-

tain a strict incognito, except to you and your partners, but no doubt Mr. Kirke's man is trustworthy."

"I'm for ever putting my foot in it," apologized King. "Kirke took the trouble to explain on the way down in the car that you were to be known as John Bell. We understood that you wouldn't reach town until morning, however, and it was quite a surprise to see you in this room when I entered it. I recognized you instantly, despite the general wretchedness of newspaper pictures. Let's be seated. What brought you here first?"

"An appeal to reason," advised Fenwick. "Soon after I reached New York I learned that Mr. Willmer was not the only one who had been subjected to annoyances over the telephone. I learned that you and Mr. Kirke were victims of the same game. I had already learned that Willmer absolutely refused to divulge the nature of the anonymous messages he received over the telephone, and that he was stubborn and hard to convince. I felt that Mr. Kirke might be more reasonable, and if I failed in my mission here I was determined to try you next."



The young man hesitated for a moment and then spoke hurriedly in a very low voice.

“Mr. Fenwick,” he began earnestly, “there ’s more to this case than I know, but I ’m pretty sure that my partners have information they do not care to give me. You will appreciate my position, I ’m sure. Even under the most ordinary circumstances I have no weighty voice in their conferences. I ’m young and lack my father’s vast experience and excellent judgment, and I feel no resentment at being required to defer to their wishes. But I do object to being kept in the dark, and unless Willmer or Kirke, or both of them, give you the information you require, I ’m going to tell you all I know.”

“Fair enough,” conceded Fenwick. “Would you object to telling me now just what the voices say or talk about?”

“Rather!” retorted the young man sharply, flushing to the roots of his blond hair. “So many people take me for an utter fool,” he reproved. “I ’ll not tell you a thing until Kirke has had an opportunity to talk.”

“I beg your pardon, Mr. King. You ’re perfectly right, and I should n’t have tried to hurry you.”

“Don’t mention it, old chap. Hullo! what’s that?”

King’s exclamation was due to the fact that every light within their radius of vision was suddenly turned off, and a report very much like that of a revolver rang out simultaneously.

The two young men were on their feet instantly, and King followed Fenwick as the latter groped his way to the foot of the stairs in the reception-hall. The lights on the upper floors were apparently still burning.

“Peters! Peters!” shouted King, running half-way up the stairs. There was no immediate response, and he raised his voice. “I say—Peters!”

“Coming, sir,” shouted the man from the third floor.

“Are the lights on up there?” demanded Fenwick.

“Yes, sir,” assured Peters, now at the head of the staircase where it turned on the second floor.

“They’re off down here,” advised Fenwick. “Where is your switch-box?”

“This way, sir,” announced the servant, producing a pocket flash-light of limited radiance.

He led Fenwick to the extreme rear of the house, threw open a panel, and flashed his light on the switches and fuses.

"Fuse blown," observed Fenwick. He picked up a spare from the bottom of the cabinet and substituted it for the burnt one. Instantly the lights on the lower floor were restored.

"My word! That was queer, was n't it?" commented King.

"Worse than queer!" responded Fenwick anxiously. "Do you realize that in these four minutes of darkness we have n't heard a word from Mr. Kirke? See to the front door, Peters. I'm going into Kirke's study."

The three hurried to the front of the house, and Peters examined the door.

"Still locked and bolted, sir, just as I fixed it a while ago. Mr. Kirke's been very particular about that lately."

Fenwick partly opened the study door and, finding the room illuminated, thrust his head in. "My God!" he exclaimed. "We're too late!"

He pushed the door entirely open and entered the room, leaving King and Peters standing horror-stricken on the threshold.

The body of Pendleton Kirke lay sprawled on the floor. Fenwick dropped on his knees beside it and, lifting it slightly, made a hurried examination.

“Dead!” he murmured. “Shot through the heart!”

“Suicide!” cried Peters. “Look on the desk, and the floor!”

They followed his gesture, indicating a spilled box of cartridges, some on the mahogany desk, and some on the floor.

“What have you in your hand, there, Peters?” demanded Fenwick sternly.

Peters turned pale as he regarded the two objects helplessly. One was the small flashlight that had done duty a moment before. The other was a revolver of somewhat ancient design.

“I—I just brought it down from the storageroom, sir. Mr. Kirke asked me to get it and clean it. He said he would want it the first thing in the morning. Look at it, sir—please do! It’s only just been cleaned!”

“I’ll take it, Peters,” observed Fenwick, slipping the weapon into his coat-pocket. He looked about the room. It was exceedingly small, and unpretentious enough, considering



the fact that one of the country's greatest capitalists dignified it by the name of "study."

The walls separating the room from the reception-hall and the one joining it at the left were entirely taken up by bookcases containing an expensive and diversified library. To the right were an olive-green metal file and two huge old-fashioned iron safes. The fourth wall at the side of the house contained two windows. Between these two windows and close to the wall was Kirke's huge mahogany glass-topped desk, and before the desk stood a revolving chair of mahogany. Kirke had evidently pitched forward from this chair and had fallen face downward close to the desk.

"Don't touch a thing!" commanded Fenwick. "Peters, call up Mr. Kirke's physician. Tell him to come here at once. Then telephone Corson of New York City. If he's not at headquarters find out where he is. Tell him I'd like him to come out here without delay."

"Yes, sir," agreed Peters, who had apparently recovered his composure. "Who shall I say wants him, sir—Mr. Bell? Or shall I say Mr. Fenwick?"

The acerbity of the man's tone did not escape Fenwick, but Peters met the young criminologist's gaze steadily enough and without flinching.

"Tell him you are telephoning for Charlie Fenwick," he directed. "And don't be impertinent; you can't afford to!"

"This is terrible, Mr. Fenwick," murmured King, his lips blanched and trembling. "I've never seen anything like this before."

The young man was visibly affected, and Fenwick led him to a chair in the hall.

"We'll wait for Peters," he observed. "I prefer to have some one in the room when I proceed with my investigation."

"Won't Peters get away?" asked King.

Fenwick shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps. It's hard to say. It doesn't make any difference, anyway. Has Kirke any family?"

"Yes; a wife and grown daughter. They are in France—Trouville, I believe. This will be a terrific shock to them."

"You'd better advise them by cable."

"Let Mr. Willmer do that," suggested the young man. "He can cable our Paris agent in code before the Associated Press has the

story on the wires. Willmer should be advised at once, also."

"From what I have heard," commented Fenwick, "Warren Willmer is in no condition to hear news of this character."

"You're right," agreed King. "I don't know what to suggest."

Peters returned.

"Dr. Rush is on the way, sir. Mr. Corson will start at once. Is there anything else, sir?"

"Yes, Peters. Mr. King will remain here for the present. I want you to come to Mr. Kirke's study with me."

"Very well, sir."

The two men reëntered the room.

"Be careful not to step on any of those cartridges, Peters," requested the young detective. "A little more light would help us. Surely Mr. Kirke didn't work at that desk under this light."

He indicated the somewhat dim indirect lighting supplied by the electrolier depending from the ceiling in the center of the room.

"No sir," responded the servant. "He has an ordinary brass desk-light. It's in the

basement. I cleaned it to-day. Shall I fetch it?"

"If you will, Peters."

The man disappeared, and Fenwick immediately picked up the telephone on Kirke's desk.

"Riverside 11,980," he directed. A full minute elapsed before he was answered. "Mr. Willmer's residence? . . . Who is speaking, please? . . . Oh, Miss Carewe? Is Mr. Seth Boyden of the telephone company still there? . . . Please let me speak to him. . . . Seth? . . . Good! Now, don't talk—just listen. This is Fenwick. I'm in Newton—Pendleton Kirke's residence. Kirke has been shot; he's dead. Advise Mr. Willmer and Miss Carewe at once.

"Tell them there is nothing they can do to-night. Otis King is here with me. Tell Mr. Willmer you consider it advisable to stay at his residence all night, in case anything happens. We're not sure yet whether Kirke was killed or committed suicide. I'll be in to see you later. Good night."

Peters reëntered the room with the desk-lamp. He deposited it on the desk and fit-



ted a plug in the wall-socket which was flush with the rear of the desk.

"That 's better," observed Fenwick, switching on the light. "The first thing we want to do, Peters, is to count these cartridges scattered about the floor and on the desk. The pasteboard carton in which they were packed is apparently new. It is marked '50 cartridges.' Let 's see how many we can find, but don't touch any of them."

Peters counted those on the desk while Fenwick devoted his attention to the larger number on the floor.

"Thirty-two, Peters," he announced. "How many do you count?"

"Seventeen, sir."

"One missing, eh? I suspected as much. And they are thirty-eight caliber, Peters. So is the revolver you cleaned for Mr. Kirke, is n't it?"

"Yes, sir," admitted the man nervously. "But I never saw these cartridges before, sir. On my word of honor, I did n't."

"I have been aware of that fact for fifteen minutes, Peters."

"Thank you, sir. Shall we look about for the other gun?"

"No, Peters; we'll let Inspector Corson do that."

"You noticed, sir, that the window-catches are on?"

"Yes, Peters. No one has gone out of the windows."

"And you knew, sir, that I was at the top of the house when this occurred?"

"Yes, I did. If the case were entirely in my hands, Peters, I would undertake to reassure you. You have mentioned the most significant facts, and when Inspector Corson arrives I shall be glad to call them to his attention."

"Thank you, Mr. Fenwick," murmured the man gratefully.

"Are there any other servants, Peters?"

"Yes, sir. Two maids. They have retired, and know nothing of what has occurred. The gardener and the chauffeur have quarters above the coach-house, sir. They are off to-night and have n't come in yet."

Fenwick nodded.

"Did you know, sir, about the telephone messages Mr. Kirke has been receiving? I thought likely you did. Well, sir, we've received one every night at about eleven o'clock,

and sometimes there have been others at midnight, or very early in the morning."

Fenwick looked at his watch.

"Two minutes of twelve. I suppose you mean to call my attention to the fact that no telephone calls have materialized this evening."

"Precisely, sir. Isn't it possible that the voices have accomplished their object?"

"Perhaps, Peters. Thank you for the suggestion."

Fenwick moved slowly about the room, examining the furniture and various objects in an apparently casual manner. He halted before the low bookcase against the wall, directly opposite Kirke's desk. On top of the bookcase were three letter-files of the box variety. He pointed to them.

"What are these, Peters?" he asked.

"Old files, sir, to be thrown out. Mr. Kirke transferred the papers they contained to that new metal file you see in the corner. I neglected to dispose of them."

"Don't you really want them? I could use one of them to advantage for some records of mine."

"You're entirely welcome to it, sir. I'll fetch you some wrapping-paper."

As Peters left the room Fenwick picked up one of the files. His observant eyes had detected a somewhat jagged hole in it. Hastily opening the file, he withdrew a small object and placed it in his vest-pocket.

Peters returned and proceeded to wrap and tie the letter-file for Fenwick.

"I'm going back to town with Mr. King, Peters. Would you mind putting the parcel in his car?"

"Not at all, sir."

"By the way, Peters, what kind of an employer was Kirke? Easy man to get along with?"

The servant's eyes flashed fire and his lips tightened.

"No, sir, he was not. As a matter of fact, sir, we had something of a quarrel this morning, and I gave him a month's notice!"



## CHAPTER V

### CORSON MAKES AN ARREST

WHEN Inspector Corson arrived he found Fenwick in the blue room with Otis King, and was advised that Dr. Rush was in the study making an examination of the body. Fenwick hurriedly sketched the events immediately preceding the tragedy. As he completed his recital of the facts the physician entered the room.

"Well?" inquired Corson.

"Murder," announced the physician positively, his thin lips tightening. "From my very superficial examination I am willing to stake my professional reputation on it. The angle and location of the wound and the absence of powder-marks indicate conclusively that Mr. Kirke could not have killed himself. The suicide theory is untenable, *anyway*, because of the absence of a weapon.

"Perhaps I can locate the weapon," suggested Corson, arising. "I'll want to view

the body and make a thorough examination of the room, and I may as well start. Will you join me, Charlie?"

"I think not," Fenwick declined. "Look things over, if you will, and then let me know what you think. I'll await you here."

Corson withdrew, and Dr. Rush, King, and Fenwick discussed the more obvious angles of the case during the half-hour he was absent. Upon his return he immediately inquired for Peters. Fenwick summoned him by ringing the bell.

"Be seated, Peters," Corson half ordered, half invited, when the servant put in an appearance. "I want all of you to listen attentively and correct me if I misstate the facts. Mr. Kirke, I understand, went to his study as soon as he returned home. He closed the door after him. At Fenwick's request, Peters invited Mr. King into the house, and shut and bolted the front door. Fenwick and King sat in this room where they could easily detect any one entering or leaving the study or the house. Is that correct?"

"Absolutely," agreed Fenwick.

"Peters went up to the third floor. Suddenly the lights went out. Peters was

called. He came down the stairs and led the way to the switch-box where it was discovered that a fuse had burnt out. It was replaced, and the lights were restored. During the period of darkness no one heard anything resembling the opening or closing of a door.

“If any one was in the room with Kirke he would have to leave by a window in the study, by the front door, or by the rear entrance. When you entered the study you discovered Kirke’s body. The study-windows were locked on the inside. The front door was locked and bolted. To escape by the rear entrance the assassin would have to pass King and Fenwick at the foot of the stairs. You are sure that no one passed, and you subsequently found the rear door locked from the inside.”

“Those are the facts,” agreed Fenwick.

“I have made a thorough search of the room and have been unable to find a weapon. The cartridges scattered about the desk and floor are thirty-eight caliber. When Peters came down the stairs in answer to shouts from Fenwick and King, he had this revolver in his hand.”

Corson produced the ancient weapon, and held it out toward Peters.

Peters moistened his lips, and then spoke hesitatingly.

"Mr. Kirke asked for it, sir. Wanted it cleaned. Said that he would like it the first thing in the morning. I had just finished cleaning it when these gentlemen called me."

Corson nodded.

"I assume, then, Peters, that Kirke had no occasion to use the weapon for some time previous to this evening?"

"Never, sir. I was quite astonished when he asked for it."

"Mr. Fenwick tells me, Peters, that you admitted having an altercation with Kirke this morning."

"Yes, sir. He accused me of waste and extravagance in the administration of his household, and was downright insulting and unusually abusive in his language. I gave him a month's notice."

"This revolver is thirty-eight caliber, Peters."

The man's face grew pale.

"Yes, sir," he agreed.



There was a tense moment of silence, which was finally relieved by Fenwick, who first smiled and then chuckled. Corson glanced at him sharply.

“What ’s the matter?” he demanded.

“Everything,” grinned Charlie. “The gun had just been cleaned, and is still clean. Besides, Peters was at the top of the house when the tragedy occurred. I’m sorry to spoil your little show, chief, but Peters is not your man.”

The inspector returned Charlie’s grin with every evidence of good nature. “I did wish to spare your feelings,” he announced, “but now I will have to be brutally frank. The circumstances of this murder indicate conclusively that the perpetrator is still within the house. If Peters is not responsible, I have the alternative of recommending to the local police that Messrs. Fenwick and King be taken into custody.”

He leaned back in his chair and surveyed the pair quizzically.

“I say,” stuttered King excitedly, “he’s right, you know! We’re natural suspects. There might be collusion between—”

“S-sh!” interrupted Fenwick, wearing a

rueful expression. "Thumbs down for Peters!" He turned to the servant apologetically. "Sorry, old man, but we've got to throw you overboard to save the ship. Your local police will have to make an arrest, and it might as well be you. I have work to do, and I can be of much greater assistance to you if I'm free to come and go. What say, inspector? I'm anxious to get to Willmer's residence as soon as possible. May I leave now?"

"Assuredly, Charlie. Are you going to devote all your attention to the murder and forget all about the voices?"

"No, indeed," retorted Charlie. "I'm going to forget all about the murder, and I'm going to devote all my time to the voices."

Corson regarded him with amazement.

"Do you really mean that?" he inquired.

"Absolutely. And now I must be off. Mr. King, do you feel equal to the task of driving me back to town?"

"I think so," assented King. "I'm rather anxious to see how the news affects Willmer, anyway."

"Then, let's be off. I'm rather anxious to see Miss Lorraine Carewe. Her voice has

given me a mental picture of her, and the prospect of a meeting pleases. Oh, by the way, chief, will you do me a favor?"

"You know I will."

Fenwick's eyes twinkled.

"Call me up, will you, just as soon as you learn what made the lights go out?"

He laughed tantalizingly and disappeared with the not unwilling King, who seemed to feel that he had been snatched from the clutches of the law. A moment later the pair were bound for New York in the financier's high-powered car.

## CHAPTER VI

### THEORIES AND FACTS

THE Willmer mansion was completely illuminated when King and Fenwick pulled up in front of it at three o'clock in the morning. Its general appearance was festive enough from without, but a vague tenseness was evident within from the moment the usually imperturbable Riggs admitted them.

"Mr. Willmer is in his den, sir," he whispered. "He's alone. That Boyden man and Miss Lorraine are in the library."

"The library, please," directed Fenwick.

Riggs willingly led the way.

Lorraine Carewe advanced with outstretched hand, ignoring the formality of an introduction. Her eyes were tear-stained.

"You're Mr. Bell, I know. I'm so glad you've come. This night has been a seething torment for all of us. Tell us, did Mr. Kirke take his own life?"

Fenwick hesitated for a moment before re-



plying, struck by the girl's unusual exotic beauty. He searched his mind fleetingly for words accurately to describe her type, and nodded approvingly when he recalled them.

"Miss Carewe," he observed, "before I answer your question, please remember to ask me what an educated Arab once told me when I installed a telephone in his home. At some more auspicious time, of course. And now for your question. I can positively assure you that Mr. Kirke did not take his own life, and I may also report that Inspector Corson, of New York, has evidence which will result in the arrest of Peters, Mr. Kirke's butler, on a charge of murder."

"Thank God!" murmured the girl as she dropped into a chair. She made an obvious effort to regain her composure, and even smiled when next she spoke. "I'm so glad it was n't the other," she explained hastily. "I was afraid of that, because of Mr. Willmer. He's absolutely distraught, and I feared another tragedy, induced perhaps by autosuggestion. Otis, pardon me; I'm not quite myself, or I should n't have ignored you. You must be dreadfully fagged, all of you.

Go to Mr. Willmer at once. I'll have some coffee sent up to the den."

The girl left the room, and Seth immediately approached Fenwick.

"Willmer's settin' in his den with a loaded revolver," he whispered. "The door is locked on the inside, but I saw him through the keyhole. He won't let any one in."

"Let's try it, at any rate," decided Fenwick; and Boyden guided them to the door of the den.

Otis King knocked upon the door.

"Go away," directed a testy voice from within.

"It's King," announced the junior member of the triumvirate.

"Wait until morning, Otis," pleaded Willmer nervously. "I don't want to see any one until daybreak."

"Mr. Bell and Mr. Boyden are with me," advised King sharply. "Don't be ridiculous. Open the door."

"Very well," quavered Willmer.

A short pause, and the key rattled uncertainly in the lock. The door was opened reluctantly, revealing the financier in a dress-

ing-gown. His face was ashen gray, and he appeared to have aged considerably during the period of five hours.

“Come in—come in!” he exclaimed querulously. As soon as they entered he snapped on the lock. “Sit down, damn it!” he shouted, as the three men stood, ill at ease.

They obeyed him.

“How about Pendleton?” he inquired. “Dead, eh? No chance of a mistake? H-m. Who did it?”

Fenwick related the startling events of the evening.

“About those cartridges,” Willmer volunteered, “I gave ’em to Kirke. Here’s more like ’em.” He opened the table drawer and tossed a box to Fenwick. “Pen said he had a gun but didn’t know if these would fit. Well, looks as if some one had a gun they did fit!”

A cackling laugh, forced and unnatural, followed, but was broken off suddenly. “Don’t you take any stock in that yarn about Peters doing it!” he cautioned, a finger pointed directly at Fenwick. “It was n’t Peters; it was the voices. They’ll get me next—me, or young Otis, here. Seems to me

they 'll get Otis first. Yes, that 's it; they 'll save the biggest and worst until last!"

"Encouraging!" murmured King, who had been considerably reassured by Fenwick during the ride back to town.

"What makes you so sure of impending disaster?" asked Fenwick.

Willmer sulked and ignored the question.

"The Good Book says," quoted Boyden, " 'Except ye utter words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For ye shall speak into the air.' "

Willmer glared at Boyden.

"There 's no need for all this damned psalm-singing!" he exclaimed. "You two telephone men are supposed to know your business, and I know mine. I don't know who the voices are any more than you do. I have a theory, but that 's all. I 'm not telling it. Get busy and establish your own theory. That was my agreement with Mr. Reeves. I 'll tell you what I please, and that 's all."

"That strikes me as being a bit unfair," put in King. "I don't know much, but I 'm going to tell Bell what I do know, whether you like it or not."

The young man's face was flushed, and he



appeared to resent the treatment accorded Fenwick.

Willmer hastily endeavored to placate him.

"Don't be rash, Otis," he counseled. "I am not quitting, but I'm resigned to almost anything. I'd advise you to adopt my own point of view. On the other hand, there's just a chance that our troubles are over. Perhaps Pendleton was involved in something of which we have no knowledge. Perhaps he was entirely responsible for the voices.

"In that event we're hardly likely to be bothered again. Has it occurred to you that there have been no mysterious messages since Kirke's death?"

"You mean that *you* have received none," corrected King.

"Peters called my attention to that point," observed Fenwick. "He said that it was quite the usual thing to receive calls from the voices between eleven P. M. and the early hours of the morning. There were no such calls to Mr. Kirke's telephone to-night or this morning."

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Willmer triumphantly. "Don't be too anxious about telling the little you do know."

King walked to the table and picked up the telephone instrument.

"Boulevard 5381," he directed. He then turned to the others. "I'm going to rouse my man and see if I've been the object of their attentions. It's just as well to make sure. Hello! Crater? . . . King speaking. Sorry to get you up, but it's somewhat important. Have we had any spooky telephone visitations to-night or this morning? . . . None? Good enough. . . . Yes, that's all, thank you. . . . No, don't wait up for me. Good night."

He smiled as he replaced the receiver.

"Perhaps you're right, sir," he conceded, turning to his partner. "This is the first time in three weeks that no calls have been made?"

"Of course I'm right," responded Willmer. "Our troubles are all over. But the cost—the terrible price! Poor Kirke!"

The financier had shaken off the fear that had previously obsessed him, because, no doubt, of his association with the others. His brooding vigil in armed solitude had played havoc with his nerves, and he had been far from normal when he had admitted them to his room. His more human reference to the

fate of his partner signified to Fenwick that he had regained his self-control.

"I 'm sorry, Mr. Willmer," observed Fenwick, "but it seems only fair to tell you that you are wrong. Mr. Kirke's death had nothing to do with the voices. Whether or not they will resume their petty and vexatious operations I do not know, but I believe they will."

"What makes you say that?" demanded Willmer truculently.

"My theory," responded Fenwick suavely. "As you remarked five minutes ago, you have yours and have no intention of divulging it. You invited me to get one of my own. I have—together with some facts."

"H-m!" muttered Willmer, drumming on the table with his fingers. "Well, well, young man! Go on; let's hear them. What are your theories and facts?"

"They are *my* theories and facts, Mr. Willmer," reminded Fenwick with dignity. "For a short time they shall remain mine alone."

The telephone bell rang. It was rather absurd to note how it startled each of them. As it rang a second and third time they glanced at each other nervously, and Willmer picked

up the automatic he had placed on the table some time previously. King was about to lift the receiver, when a warning gesture from Fenwick caused him to abandon his purpose.

Charlie turned to Boyden. "Is there a switchboard?" he asked hurriedly.

"Yes; two trunks and eighteen stations. This is the only extension connected up with a trunk."

"Where is there another extension?"

"Library. Shall I connect it with central?"

"Please do. King, go to the 'phone in the library and ask the operator to tell you who is calling on this trunk. Know the numbers?"

"River 11,980 and 11,981," announced King, hurrying from the room.

Boyden left the room with him to go to the switchboard on the lower floor. The ringing continued at intervals until Fenwick lifted the receiver.

"Mr. Willmer's residence," he said.

"Git Willmer on the wire, will yer?" requested a rough, displeasing voice.

"Who wishes to speak with him?" Fenwick inquired.



"Me. Who do yer t'ink?"

"Mr. Willmer has retired," advised Fenwick. "If you wish, I'll see that he gets any message you may wish to give me."

"Aw right. Now git dis straight. You tell Willmer that what happened to-night is jest a warnin' to him. Tell him he'd better come across, or we'll tell de newspapers. You tell him he's gotta do de right t'ing. D'ye get me?"

"I get you," assured Fenwick positively. "Who shall I tell him left the message?"

"He'll know," responded the other.

"How can he 'come across'?" questioned Charlie.

"When he's ready he kin tell us, an' we'll let him know. G'-by."

A sudden click and the party was gone. Fenwick replaced the receiver, and then informed Willmer of the nature of the conversation.

"About the same as usual," admitted the latter grudgingly. "I have n't the slightest idea of what the fellow means." He actually seemed relieved, however, at the realization that Fenwick had obtained definite knowledge of the character of the mysterious conversa-

tions and had no apparent intention of pressing him for further information.

Boyden reëntered the room, followed by King.

"I listened at the switchboard," advised Boyden. "Kin you tell us what that feller looked like?"

Lorraine Carewe entered with a tray bearing a pot of coffee and the necessary accessories for serving it. Riggs followed with another holding sandwiches, and proceeded to pour the coffee.

"Sit down, child," directed Willmer, his eyes resting on the girl fondly.

She joined them and accepted a cup of coffee from Riggs.

"Mr. Bell has just talked with one of our unknown telephone friends," explained Willmer, "and Boyden, here, has asked him to describe the person who called. I had no idea that such progress had been made in telephony."

"T ain't every one kin do it," advised Boyden. "But I've seen Mr. Bell do it time and again."

Fenwick hesitated.

"It is a fact," he advised, "that the charac-

ter and physical characteristics of a person telephoning may be determined by the person at the other telephone. When you use the telephone to converse with a stranger, you unconsciously project your personality over the wire. This tendency is slightly exaggerated by your desire to create a definite impression or to attain a definite purpose. The slight exaggeration must merely be identified. Other points which are involved are enunciation, vocabulary, telephone habits, geographical variations in pronunciation, racial characteristics, and some others which are less tangible."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Miss Carewe. "Do tell us what the last caller was like."

He ignored the others, and appeared to be addressing the girl exclusively.

"The man is young, about twenty-four, I should say. He is a New Yorker, dark-complexioned, dirty, illiterate, wears a cap, smokes cigarettes, and lives by his wits. He is a braggart and a coward, although he never shrinks from physical conflict when the odds favor him. I should imagine his home to be on the East Side."

"You've described the kind of gunman one

sees in a play or reads about in the newspapers,” commented Miss Carewe. “I wonder if we shall ever have the opportunity of determining the accuracy of your description.”

“Jest leave it to Mr. Bell,” chimed in Boyden. “I ’ll bet a big red apple he ’s got it exactly right.”

“Let ’s have your report, Mr. King,” requested Fenwick. “Did you learn the telephone number of the calling party?”

King shook his head dismally.

“No, I did n’t,” he advised. “The operator gave me to the supervisor, and the supervisor turned me over to the night chief operator. Each one in turn assured me that no one was talking to Riverside 11,980!”



## CHAPTER VII

### FLIGHT

**W**ARREN WILLMER was finally prevailed upon to retire, but not before King, Boyden, and Fenwick had agreed to remain at his home until daylight. Riggs showed them to their rooms, and Fenwick, too, was about to turn in when Boyden entered, clad in an old-fashioned night-shirt.

"We 've got to talk some time, Charlie," he announced, "and things has been movin' so fast I ain't a bit sleepy. How about you?"

"I think ten minutes of conversation might help," admitted Fenwick. "What have you learned?"

"Everything an' nothin'," responded the old man. "Toll-tickets hain't been a bit o' good, so far as tracin' calls is concerned. We 're up against a queer bunch. These here millionaires want to be helped, but they don't want to help. Pendleton Kirke knew more than he cared to tell, but he 's past helpin' us. Willmer knows a lot but ain't sayin' a word. Only

way to get anything out o' him is to scare it out of him. He seems to scare easy. Young King is the nicest actin' one of the lot, but he don't know nothin'. As for the gal, she's a little thoroughbred. I'm kinder dependin' on her more than any o' the others."

"What's her status in the household?" inquired Fenwick.

"She's the daughter of an old partner of Willmer's. When her pa died he was busted, and Willmer promised to take keer o' the gal. She's full o' spunk, though, and independent as kin be. Insisted on earnin' her livin', took a secretarial course in some school, an' now she's Willmer's right-hand man. The old man's crazy about her, and it's the only decent thing I've noticed about him."

"Treats her pretty nice, does he?" quizzed Fenwick.

"Like a daughter. O' course she goes to his office every day, but she has her own car, and he don't deny her a thing. Oh, yes, he does—jest one. Seems the girl was studyin' for the operatic stage before her dad cashed in, an' she's crazy to continue her studies. She don't stand much chanst, though, with two of 'em discouragin' her."

"Who are the two?" demanded Fenwick.

"Willmer an' young Otis King. Willmer thinks the environment would be bad for her, an' young King's afraid she'll fall head over heels in love with a career."

"H'm," mused Fenwick, a momentary shade passing over his face; "so that's how the the land lies. Nice chap, King. Where did you get all this information, Seth?"

"Some from the gal, but most of it from Riggs. Riggs is more or less human when you get to know him. Riggs sez Miss Carewe has a wonderful voice. She sings at little musicales once in a while."

"How does Willmer feel about that?"

"I don't know about that," confessed Boyden, "but I'll find out in the mornin'."

"Please do. How did Miss Carewe know who I was when I entered the room to-night?"

"She did n't," grinned Seth. "She thinks you're John Bell. Y' see she answered the telephone when you called from Kirke's place, and when we finished talkin' I told her you was my boss. She wanted to know all about you, so I told her you were an expert telephone man and would clear up this trouble they've been havin' in no time at all."

"Hope I don't disappoint her," observed Fenwick. "What else have you learned?"

"Nothin' much. Shortly before nine o'clock I was talkin' to Willmer an' the 'phone rang. I coaxed him to answer it, an' at the same time I cut in with a test-set. It sounded like a darky talkin'. 'Ah 'm askin' is you goin' to do the right thing, Mr. Willmer? Better had!' sez the feller. At that Willmer slammed the receiver on the hook, an' by the time I took it off again the call was lost. Willmer was hoppin' mad because I listened in."

"Don't worry about that," counseled Fenwick.

"I won't," promised the little man. "Now, tell me about the murder."

Boyden drew himself up on the bed and listened spellbound while the young criminologist gave a thrilling account of the events at Kirke's residence. He hung upon every syllable, glorified in the more baffling details, and spent considerable time examining the letter-file and the small object which Fenwick had found in it.

"Queer thing, ain't it, Charlie? Jest before I came away I was regrettin' the fact that we did n't have a murder case instead of



plain ordinary blackmail. Now we've got both. Do you aim to handle the Newton end of it alone?"

"I'm through with Newton, Seth. I always do the important thing first. Besides, Corson is at Newton, and while he's officially out of his territory I know he won't leave the Pendleton Kirke case until he has the answer. I'm satisfied with that arrangement, because it will keep him out of our way. So far as we're concerned, the answer is in New York."

"It's a great shame," remarked Boyden plaintively. "First murder case I've been on, an' I ain't even seen the corpse! Well, I s'pose it can't be helped. What am I to do in the mornin'?"

"You're going to be pretty busy," advised Fenwick. "First, I want you to arrange to have all service observed from the telephone in this house and at King's place at Forest Hills. Have the chief operator keep special records. Next, see the Riverside wire-chief and get him to make a voltmeter test on the two lines in this house."

Boyden whistled, then nodded approvingly.

"I see what you mean," he announced. "Gosh, mebbe that's the answer!"

"I doubt it, Seth, but we can't afford to overlook it. The next thing for you to do is to arrange with the operators at Willmer's office to let you sit in at the switchboard. Listen in on all calls for Willmer's personal extension. If any of them appear to involve our mysterious foes, endeavor to trace them. That ought to keep you busy all day. I'll be here at the house most of the time but will keep in touch with you if I can. Now, let's get a few hours' sleep, or we won't be fit in the morning."

"Right," agreed the little man, jumping from the bed and making for the door.

"Oh, Seth!" shouted Fenwick. "How about the telephone in this room? Is the cord up connecting it with one of the trunks?"

"Took keer o' that a little while ago," announced Boyden proudly. "You're up on one trunk, and the station in my room is plugged for the other one. If any one calls this house in the next few hours, no one's going to know it but Charlie Fenwick an' yours truly!"

On the heels of this announcement came the faintest imaginable tinkle of the telephone bell. Both men stood silent and motionless,

as if awaiting a further and decided signal, but none came.

"What was that?" whispered Boyden.

"That was the condenser discharging," advised Charlie. "Some one has pulled out the plug, and we are no longer connected with central!"

He hurried to the telephone stand and lifted the receiver to verify the fact. A short examination assured him that his diagnosis was correct.

"Try the extension in your room, Seth," he directed; and Seth darted out of the room. In a moment he returned.

"Not connected," he reported; "and just as I came out of my room some one slipped into a room down the corridor. I didn't see who it was—just saw the door close."

"Which room?" queried Fenwick.

"The third from this one. I don't know whose room it is, but whoever left it must have gone down to the switchboard to make a call."

"I doubt it," observed Charlie. He returned to the telephone and again lifted the receiver and listened.

"You're wrong, Seth," he announced as he

replaced the receiver. "Any one endeavoring to make a telephone call would have had to remove the plug from either your extension or mine. Upon completion of the call our extension would undoubtedly have been reconnected with the trunk. The person who went down-stairs did so with the express purpose of shutting us off from communication with the outside."

"I guess you're right, Charlie. Whoever 't was must have been readin' the seventeenth chapter o' Leviticus."

Somewhat amused, Fenwick waited. So did Seth, until he could wait no longer.

"Well, ain't ye gonna ask me what Leviticus says?" he demanded impatiently.

"What does it say, Seth?"

"It says, 'I will cut him off.' How 's that? Purty good one that time, eh?"

"Pretty good, Seth. Now run along down-stairs and connect our stations with central once more. Then go to bed. We need sleep."

"I need more sleep than you do," advised Boyden.

"How is that?" inquired Charlie.



"Oh, I do 'most everything slower than you do, an' I reckon I sleep slower than you, too. G' night, Charlie!"

"Good night, Seth," chuckled Fenwick, and he snapped off the lights, jumped into bed, and immediately fell asleep.

Three hours later he was awakened by a knock at his door. Without a word he slipped from the bed, released the catch, and threw the door wide open. Boyden, fully clothed and fresh and cheerful, greeted him with a smile.

"It 's seven thirty, Charlie," he announced. "Thought you 'd like to get an early start to-day."

"All right, Seth," he yawned, vexed at the commonplace summons that had aroused him. "I 'll be down shortly."

"I 'll nose around a bit," observed the old man. "Mebbe I 'll have something to tell you at breakfast."

A refreshing shower and the luxury of a shave entirely dissipated his desire for further sleep, and the young criminologist hurriedly dressed and descended the stairs.

"Good morning, sir," greeted Riggs. "We breakfast at all hours, sir. Miss Carewe

has just been served. Will you join her?"

Fenwick assented and entered the dining-room. Lorraine looked up from her grape-fruit.

"Ambition could be made of no sterner stuff than yours," she smiled. "You've scarcely slept."

"How about yourself?" he challenged.

The smile faded.

"I have n't slept a wink," she confessed, as he took the chair Riggs indicated, facing her. "I've lain awake for ages, just thinking of poor Mr. Kirke and of Olive—that's his daughter, you know. Do you really think you can soon put an end to all these dreadful occurrences?"

"Undoubtedly," he assured her. "We shall need all the help we can get, however, and I'm looking to you for assistance."

Her eyes widened.

"Flattery, small talk—or do you really mean it?" she inquired. "There's little enough I know about these strange happenings. Of course I'll gladly answer any questions."

"I knew you would," he assured her. "Tell me who Mr. Willmer's neighbors are."

She gave him a graphic description of the owners or occupants of the adjoining mansions and apartment-houses, their names resembling a page from the social register. She recited their hobbies and foibles, defining their social positions and their relations with Willmer and the other two members of the triumvirate. She could recall no reason for enmity between any of them and her employer and guardian. Fenwick listened attentively, thoroughly enjoying her vivacity, the clearness of her enunciation, and the music of her lovely voice.

"Now tell me something about Otis King," he requested. "How does he stand in the estimation of Mr. Willmer? Has he ever had any trouble with Mr. Kirke?"

A momentary blush was followed by a look of apparent reluctance.

"The business of the triumvirate is colossal," she advised slowly. "It is carried on throughout the world. Mr. Willmer is a remarkable executive. So was Mr. Kirke. The essential details of the business were always at their finger-tips, and I have seldom seen them hesitate when a crisis arose. Mr. King was always taken into their confidence,

but he was handicapped by lack of experience. Sometimes he disagreed with them. On such occasions his personality and that of Mr. Kirke would clash. They were often at odds, but Mr. Willmer is wonderfully persuasive and convincing, and he usually straightened things out."

"Have they had any recent disagreements? Kirke and King, I mean."

"No, Mr. Bell; none that I know of."

"You would probably know if they had?" he suggested.

Again she blushed slightly.

"I think not, Mr. Bell. We are just good friends, and Otis is not the man to discuss his business problems with a woman."

They were interrupted by Riggs.

"Mr. Corson to see you, sir."

"Do you mind if I have him in?" asked Charlie.

"Not at all," responded Lorraine. "I'm really curious to see a great detective."

Riggs left the room, and the inspector strode in a moment later in his characteristic manner a picture of vigor and keenness.

"I beg pardon," he murmured, observing the girl.



"Allow me to present Inspector Corson, Miss Carewe," introduced Fenwick.

"Delighted, Miss Carewe," acknowledged Corson. "I would n't think of intruding, but it's rather important."

"Won't you join us?" invited the girl.

"Thank you; I will have a sip of coffee, please. I've been going all night."

"Anything new or startling?" queried Fenwick.

"Yes; the Newton police have arrested Peters. It's ridiculous to suspect Peters, of course, when you have an alibi for him. I want to know how perfect that alibi is."

"Faultless and flawless," announced Fenwick. "I should call it unquestionable, were it not for the coincidence of the revolver."

"Some juries would hang a man on that evidence, Bell," grunted Corson. "But that's neither here nor there. Last night I kidded you and King a bit about your own position in this matter. Now I'm not kidding. How good is your own alibi, *and how good is King's?*"

The girl gasped, and Fenwick chuckled.

"I'm afraid we can only corroborate each other's story, inspector," he advised.

"I know mighty well that you're not involved," interposed Corson hastily. "How about King? Were you seated in the blue room in a position to see him the moment he entered the house? Would he have had time to open the door of Kirke's study while Peters was bolting the front door?"

"Probably—yes. Why do you ask?"

"Peters tells me that King and Kirke were arguing when they drove up to the house. He could hear them when he hurried to admit Kirke, and as he opened the door King shouted from the car, 'You'll tell me all you know, or have reason to regret it!'"

"Well?"

"I've questioned Kirke's maids and eliminated them. I know that some one in the house was responsible for Kirke's death. It was n't Peters, and it was n't you. Who else was there?"

"Otis King," admitted Fenwick. "He sat beside me when the lights went out—when the sound of a shot rang out. He is absolutely innocent."

"Could n't Mr. Kirke have taken his own life, inspector?" queried Lorraine anxiously.

"He could n't kill himself and then dispose

of the pistol," returned Corson. "I've ransacked that den from top to bottom. Now I want to see King."

Boyden entered the room, beaming.

"My assistant, Mr. Boyden, inspector," introduced Fenwick, and the two shook hands.

"Kin I talk right out in meetin', Mr. Bell?" inquired Seth. "We're all good friends."

Fenwick nodded.

"Remember how some one snuck downstairs last night an' disconnected our 'phones? Remember I told you how I seen some one shut the door o' the third room f'm yours. Well, sir, Riggs tells me that King was s'posed to sleep in that room. I trotted up to question him, but he was n't there!"

Corson jumped to his feet.

"There you are!" he muttered. "What does that look like?"

"Flight!" answered Fenwick. "I wonder if it really is?"

## CHAPTER VIII

### A NEW MAN IN THE CASE

“**W**HERE did King keep his car overnight?” demanded Corson.

“Riggs tells me it was still in front o’ the house when the young feller turned in last night,” advised Boyden.

“Do any of you know the license-number?” catechized the inspector.

Fenwick turned to Lorraine, who appeared to hesitate. He nodded reassuringly.

“I know it,” she admitted. “It’s 23-773.”

“Thank you, miss,” acknowledged Corson. He walked across the room to the telephone-table.

“Spring 3100,” he directed. A pause. “Give me McKetchnie, operator. . . . Mac, this is Corson. Put down this number. Ready? 23-773. That’s a tag-number; stolen motor-car. France-Corlies speedster; color, dark brown. Thief has owner’s credentials. Find it this morning, within the hour



if you can, and be sure to get the man who took it! When you do, call me on Newton 4987. If I 'm not there they 'll tell you where I am. G'by."

He jabbed the receiver on the hook with an air of satisfaction.

"If King is anywhere in the five boroughs with that car we 'll find him," he assured Fenwick. "When we do he 'll have to explain."

"Ingenious enough," acknowledged Charlie. "You certainly have wonderful machinery at your command. I rather fancy you 'll get your man."

"Sure to," responded Corson. "I 'm really interested in this case, and I mean to help the Queens people get to the bottom of it. Kirke was shot, and the revolver can't be found. Obviously he couldn't shoot himself. A number of people were locked in his house and were there when the shooting occurred. One of them is guilty. I 'm gambling it was Otis King."

"What disposition did he make of the weapon afterward?" inquired Fenwick quietly.

Corson glared at him.

"Unfortunately," he observed slowly, "King was not searched before he left Newton."

"Neither was I," reminded Fenwick unperturbed.

"I 'm not overlooking that fact, either," retorted Corson making for the door. "I 'll see *you* later." With a good-humored smile and nod, he left them.

"Get down town right away, Seth," ordered Fenwick, "and follow out the program we discussed last night."

"I ain't had any breakfast," reminded the little man reproachfully.

"True enough, you have n't. Well, after breakfast, then. It's been rather an eventful breakfast, has n't it?" he added, turning to Miss Carewe.

"Rather," she admitted, smiling wanly. She rang for Riggs to serve Boyden. "Just what are you going to do to-day, Mr. Boyden?" she inquired.

Seth reflected for a moment.

"In the words of Isaiah, sixty-fifth chapter, verse twenty-four, 'Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speakin', I will hear.' "

Her brows wrinkled in bewitching perplexity.

"He means," interpreted Fenwick, "that

he's going down to the Willmer Building to listen in on some telephone conversations."

She laughed, a rippling spontaneous laugh that seemed to please Boyden.

"There ain't a thing about the telephone business the Bible don't tell about," he boasted.

"Unfortunately we're not so familiar with it as you, Mr. Boyden."

"It's a great pity," he announced. "I don't know what the young folks is comin' to these days."

Lorraine searched his serious countenance and successfully located the mischievous twinkle in his eyes that belied the lugubrious announcement.

"You're a dear," she decided impetuously. "And what do you propose doing, Mr. Bell?" she asked curiously.

"I contemplate spending the morning right here," he told her. "Perhaps we'll have some more mysterious messages, and if we do, I shall want to answer them."

"That's splendid. I shall be here most of the morning myself. Mr. Willmer is not going to the office to-day. I told Riggs to let him sleep. I felt so sorry for him last night and this morning. He was like a noble old

lion at bay; grim, determined, and yet fully aware of his helplessness. If he really has enemies, they could choose no more opportune moment to strike than the present. You'll watch carefully, won't you?" she pleaded. "He needs protection."

"His condition is entirely psychological," declared Fenwick. "You should use your influence to induce a better state of mind. He appears to me to be suffering from a form of mental cowardice. But tell me, have you no fears for the safety of Otis King?"

"None," she advised, meeting his gaze tranquilly. "Chief Corson's hypothesis is absurd and ridiculous! I'll grant that his sudden disappearance apparently strengthens the chief's theory, but I dare say Otis will turn up shortly, and with a satisfactory explanation."

"I think and hope your conclusions are correct, Miss Carewe."

"Thank you."

"It's been kind o' you two young people to keep me comp'ny," announced Seth, who had completed a hearty breakfast. "I'll be goin' down town now. Shall I have your bag sent here f'm the hotel?"

"Please do. I'm going to look over the



switchboard and other telephone equipment," announced Fenwick as Lorraine arose.

"May I accompany you?" she inquired. "It's so marvelous and intricate that I'm forever wondering about it. I'll try not to annoy you by asking questions."

"Glad to have you, and don't be afraid to ask questions."

Seth departed, and Lorraine led the way to the switchboard in a small room at the rear of the house, which served as a sort of office to Willmer's housekeeper. Fenwick gave it a casual examination, idly throwing the keys back and forth.

"How is it possible for one girl to connect us with any of the thousands of telephones in this great city?" asked Lorraine.

"It requires two girls, not one," corrected Fenwick. "A call is handled by only one operator if both the called and calling parties are served by the same central office. A very small percentage of the calls made each day fall into this class.

"Your operator, however, has calling circuits to all other central offices. For instance, if you should ask for a Cortlandt number, while your operator was repeating your num-

ber to you she would also be pressing a key which would connect her with an operator in the Cortlandt central office. Over that private wire your operator would give the number to the other operator, and the other girl would repeat a mystic number which tells the Riverside operator which trunk to plug your call in on. In the mean time the Cortlandt operator has already plugged in your number and connected it with the trunk she has designated, so that when your girl plugs in on that trunk your connection is completed. Then a machine starts ringing the bell of the person you have called. Perfectly simple, is n't it?"

"I should call it uncanny," observed Lorraine. "There's another thing I want to ask you. Would it be possible for some one to tap our wires?"

"For the purpose of listening in? Yes; that would be entirely possible."

"No; that is n't quite what I mean. Would it be possible for a wire-tapper to send messages over our wire? To talk over it?"

"Yes, indeed. In fact, I'm going to work on that theory this morning. You will recall that I questioned you regarding the neighbors? I had that thought in mind at the time.

It hardly seems probable, however, since it would be detected sooner or later."

"I see. What part of the telephone service are you and Mr. Boyden responsible for?"

"I am a wire-chief, which really means an electrician. The wire-chief is responsible for the mechanical end of the telephone central office—the wiring, the dynamos and storage batteries, the cables and fuses. Each wire-chief has a staff of trained men to assist him either within or outside the central office. These men repair any injury to the wires or instruments as soon as it is reported. Seth is an outside trouble man, usually called a trouble-shooter."

"What a ridiculous title! Mr. Boyden is the last man in the world I would imagine going about looking for trouble. I suppose you have all kinds of weird and uncanny instruments to assist you?"

"We have," smiled Fenwick. "We have, for instance, a voltmeter, which enables us to determine if current is flowing off a line, and which indicates whether trouble on a circuit is inside or outside the central office, and sometimes tells us the nature of the trouble.

We also have a Wheatstone bridge, an instrument by which we determine the precise locality at which a break has occurred. There are many other devices the wire-chief uses each day."

"And what makes the telephone talk?" queried Lorraine naïvely. "Of course I'm frightfully non-technical, but I don't know any other way to word my question."

"I understand," he assured her. "There are three essential parts to an ordinary telephone. These are the transmitter, the source of current, and the receiver. Telephone current is very feeble and really plays a less important part in a telephone conversation than the vibrations of your voice."

He unscrewed the rubber mouthpiece of the transmitter and revealed a sheet of extremely thin, flexible metal.

"This is a diaphragm," he announced. "When sound-waves strike it it moves a tiny distance, sufficient to move a small rod up and down. The rod is fixed to the center of the diaphragm and at the other end to a small disk of carbon. This carbon disk, or button, rests in a cup of the same material. The cup



is loosely filled with grains of carbon, which have a high electrical resistance. In other words, they choke back electricity.

“The current must pass through the carbon cup, the carbon grains, and to the carbon button before it can reach the receiver at the distant point. The more scattered the grains are the greater their resistance, and the less electricity can pass. The less electricity the less noise at the other end of the wire. So when you speak into the transmitter the diaphragm moves, pressing the grains tighter together or letting them rest loosely. Each tiny movement caused by the vibration of your voice changes the force of the current and reproduces sound in the receiver at the other telephone.”

“Sheer magic!” exclaimed the girl. “I’m sorry to take up so much of your time, and I’m going to leave you to your own devices. If you want me, Riggs will find me for you. Thank you for my lesson in telephony.”

“Don’t mention it!” murmured Fenwick, his frankly admiring gaze following her as she left the room.

He again directed his attention to the switchboard, removing the panel beneath it to

examine the wiring. An examination of the extension-stations and jacks for portable instruments on the lower floor of the house followed. Returning to the switchboard he connected the library extension with central and then ascended the rear staircase to the second floor, where he made a similar inspection of the equipment. The maids were busy putting the rooms in order and regarded him curiously as he made his somewhat perfunctory examination. When he reached Lorraine Carewe's boudoir he hesitated until a somewhat over-vivacious French girl assured him he might enter.

He walked directly to the escritoire on which the telephone stood and removed the little bisque doll, whose rose-colored crinoline skirt concealed the instrument. The telephone was of special finish, old rose in color, harmonizing with the general tone of the room. Scarcely giving it a glance, he carefully replaced the bisque creation and walked from the room, the maid laughing audibly as he left. He flushed to his ears, realizing how evident his confusion had been, and how unimpressive his examination. Miladi's boudoir had unnerved him, and he had only a vague impres-

sion of its appointments, daintiness, and charm.

"Idiot!" he growled in self-reproach, and then hesitated on the threshold of the library. Miss Carewe was engaged in letter-writing.

"May I come in?" he inquired.

"Surely." She laid aside her pen. "Why, what has happened, Mr. Bell?"

"Nothing," he assured her, his blushes deepening, and once more he mentally cursed his diffidence.

Her eyes sparkled mischievously.

"Sure?" she inquired.

The ringing of the telephone bell afforded him a welcome respite, but caused him to recall that he had connected the instrument with central, had decided to visit the library, and had intuitively felt that Lorraine would be there when he arrived. Lorraine answered the telephone.

"It's Mr. Boyden calling you," she announced, offering him the instrument. He conversed with Boyden for five minutes, and, when he replaced the receiver on the hook, had entirely recovered his composure. Miss Carewe was sealing some envelopes when he turned to her.

"Boyden's had a lead," he informed her, "but it looks as if we're up against a very ingenious gang. One of the voices asked for Mr. Willmer at the office a while ago, and Boyden took the call. He engaged the fellow in conversation and at the same time scribbled directions on a pad for one of the P. B. X. operators to follow.

"First he told her to find out who was calling, and she learned that the call was from a coin-box station at the Grand Central. Then he told her to learn the numbers of the other public telephones in booths adjacent to the one from which the call was made, and to have the operator ring one of them. He hoped to attract some one's attention and have them nab the fellow who was talking.

"All the 'phones were reported busy, however, and the owner of the voice apparently grew suspicious and hung up. Boyden persisted and finally got in communication with the Grand Central people, who investigated. They found, that the fellow had taken the receivers off the hooks of all the other coin-box telephones before making his call, for the purpose of preventing any such attempt as that made by Boyden. The operator can't



ring, you know, if the receiver is off the hook."

"And the man got away?" she asked, troubled.

"I'm afraid so. Boyden has gone up to look around and ask questions, but it seems sort of hopeless to expect him to learn anything about a single individual in the masses of transient persons at the Grand Central."

"You haven't been as successful as you hoped then?" she inquired.

"We haven't done anything spectacular, but we're making progress. We've been gathering together a number of tiny particles for use in a mosaic, and we'll soon be in a position to put the particles together. When we do we expect to have a picture that any one can understand."

"Soon?"

"Very soon, I think."

She smiled and seemed reassured, her manner changing as she changed the subject.

"You wanted me to remind you to tell me something," she said. "Something about what an educated Arab once told you."

Fenwick was uncomfortably affected by

the reminder, and once more was apparently covered with confusion.

"Some other time, please," he responded hastily. "N-not now."

"Do tell me now," she persisted.

"I—I can't. I don't know you well enough. I don't know what ever possessed me to make such a statement. Please forget all about it."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," she declined positively. "I've half a notion it was about me, anyway. Come, Mr. Telephone Man, what was it?"

"It would be presumptuous—impertinent, for me to tell you."

"I don't believe it. Tell me; I'm waiting!"

"You insisted, remember," he advised, struggling to retain his composure. "This Arab once described to me a Moslem's idea of feminine beauty, and had reduced it to a kind of mathematical formula quite easy to remember. He said, first of all, that a woman must possess four attributes that are black—hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, and pupils. Then four that are white—skin, hands, teeth,

and the white of the eye; four that are red—cheeks, lips, tongue, and gums; four that are long—back, arms, fingers, and—and limbs. Lastly, four that are small—eyebrows, nose, lips, and fingers. This, he said, was Allah's conception of beauty."

Fenwick regarded the opposite side of the room with well simulated interest, while the girl repressed a smile.

"And why should you feel it incumbent upon you to acquaint me with the aberrations of some harem-loving scamp of an Arab?" she demanded sternly.

"They are not aberrations," he denied stoutly. "Can't you see that, despite the mathematical feature of it, he's really described a wonderfully beautiful woman?"

"Well, what of it, Mr. Bell?" she persisted. "Why tell me?"

"Because his description occurred to me the minute I saw you," he blurted. "You—you are the girl he described!"

There was a moment's uncomfortable silence, broken by the girl.

"You should surely succeed in running down the voices, Mr. Bell," she declared. "You are so observant! I suppose I should

feel flattered at your kindly interest, your knowledge of the color of my eyelashes, gums, and tongue. You promised that your statement would be—”

“Hullo, Lorraine,” greeted Otis King, sauntering into the room and dropping into a chair. “Morning, Bell.” He sensed a constrained situation and sought to relieve it. “Been bottling up the voices, you two?”

“Where have you been, Otis?” asked the girl.

“Just came in with Boyden. He picked me up at the Grand Central.”

“What?” she exclaimed, directing a worried glance at Fenwick.

“At the Grand Central. Say, Bell, how did Inspector Corson know my car was stolen?”

“Was it stolen?” asked Fenwick quietly.

“Sure was. I heard it moving away from the house this morning just as I was getting ready for bed. Slipped on my things and gave chase for hours in a taxi. Lost and found it several times. Finally picked up the trail way up the Drive, headed the fellow off, chased him down town, and lost him in the crowd. Then, at the Grand Central, I



stumbled right on to the fellow, in the clutches of an officer, who insisted that the theft had been reported by Corson!"

"It had," advised Fenwick. "Did they get the thief?"

"Corson and Boyden have him downstairs now. Shall I tell you what he looks like?"

"Please, Otis," begged the girl.

"Well, he's an Italian, about twenty-four, dark complexioned, dirty, illiterate, wears a cap, and smokes cigarettes."

"Why, that's the same as the man you described this morning!" advised the girl, turning to Fenwick. "That's the description you gave of the owner of the voice!"

"Right-o," asserted King. "Just what I've been thinking. Come down and have a look. Corson wants to see both of you, anyway."

## CHAPTER IX

NICK NAPOLIELO

THE Italian sat stolidly in an easy-chair at Corson's side. Boyden occupied another chair in the doorway leading to the hall, as if to discourage any attempt at flight. As Fenwick, King, and Miss Carewe entered the room the prisoner's face showed a momentary flash of animation, which as quickly disappeared.

"Which one of them do you know, Nick?" demanded Corson, observant as ever.

"Nobody, boss," responded Nick promptly.

"That's a lie, but we'll let it pass for the present. Were it not for a fabric of lies there would be no mystery to this case at all. It's merely a question of determining what is false and what is true. You'd all be better off if you'd come through with the truth. Mr. King for instance, learned that I had reported his car as stolen. I did that so that the police would find him for me after his signi-

ficant disappearance. Then he turns up with the story that it really had been stolen, and that he had been endeavoring to catch the thief. Does n't that strike you, Mr. King, as stretching the long arm of coincidence a bit too far?"

King shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems to me, old chap, that you are the lad who did the stretching. You reported the car stolen when you really believed it to be in my possession. You are entirely responsible for the coincidence. A fabric of lies, did you say?"

Corson glared at him.

"Unfortunately," he advised. "I am compelled to fight fire with fire. You are in a particularly unenviable position. What were you and Pendleton Kirke quarreling about when you drove up to his house last night?"

"The voices," answered King promptly.

"What about them?"

"Kirke admitted that he knew more than he cared to tell. I insisted on sharing his knowledge, and what was originally a mild dispute suddenly assumed the proportions of a hot altercation. It ended, however, when he entered his home at Newton."

“Or a few minutes later,” added the inspector significantly. “Why did you wait in your car while he entered the house?”

“Kirke promised to get some papers for me.”

“Indeed! Mr. Bell, does n’t it strike you that we are a pair of idiots not to have investigated that phase of the case?”

“Not at all,” responded Fenwick quietly.

“Why not?” demanded Corson. “Presumably the papers were in Kirke’s den. They have been referred to on several occasions, but I have not heard anything about what happened to them. Are they still in the den, or did they disappear after Kirke was killed? What sort of papers were they?”

Both Fenwick and King began to speak at once, but Fenwick nodded to King and the latter answered Corson.

“They were documents of a confidential nature, the property of Willmer, Kirke & King. They were in the center drawer of Kirke’s desk. Mr. Bell obtained them for me while we were waiting for you to appear. They are now in Mr. Willmer’s possession.”

“Is that correct, Bell?”



"Absolutely. They were in an envelope addressed to King."

"Why did n't you take the trouble to advise me?" persisted Corson.

"It struck me as a detail of no consequence, and is as excusable as the fact that you entirely ignored all references to the papers."

"H-m! Mr. Boyden tells me that one of the voices telephoned Willmer's office to-day, and that the call was traced to the upper level, Grand Central Station. King was at the Grand Central at the time the call was received, and a few minutes later encountered the officer who arrested Nick. Did you make a telephone-call, Mr. King, from the Grand Central?"

"I did."

"Who did you call?"

"Police headquarters, to report the theft of my car. They told me it had already been reported by you."

"You made no other calls?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Please answer my question."

"I have nothing to say," responded King coldly.

"Mr. Boyden, what sort of a voice did you hear over the 'phone?"

"Well, inspector, I'd say that the feller who was talkin' was tryin' to disguise his voice."

"Would you recognize the voice? Had you ever heard it before?"

Boyden hesitated.

"Well, sir," he proceeded, "just as soon as I heard it I kinder thought to myself, 'That feller sounds like Mr. Otis King!'"

Lorraine gasped at this announcement, and steadied herself by grasping the back of a chair.

"Is it true, Otis?" she demanded. "Are we to believe that you are leagued with this murderous band?"

"Not a bit of it, dear girl," he denied lightly. "Old Hawkshaw and the parson here seem to have me up a bit of a tree, but it's only a momentary diversion, 'pon my honor. Let Messrs. Corson and Boyden proceed with their bizarre entertainment while we remain mute but interested spectators."

"Smart, are n't you?" yelled Corson, losing his temper at this show of King's indifference

and contempt. "You know perfectly well that I have n't got enough of a case against you yet to hold you, especially if you turn loose your high-priced legal talent! Well, I don't give a damn how many millions you have in back of you, I 'm going to get you!"

King returned the inspector's glare with a chuckle.

"Let me know if I can be of assistance," he volunteered.

"You can," announced Corson grimly. "Hereafter I won't make a single move on this case unless you are with me. You are going to be my first assistant."

"You overwhelm me with honors," protested Otis. "However I accept. What's our first job? Shall it be the voices, or the murderer of poor old Pendleton Kirke?"

"Otis!" reproved the girl, shocked by the young millionaire's flippant manner. She twisted at her handkerchief with both hands and glanced uncertainly about the room. "I—I can't stand this! I am going to my room."

She hurried past Boyden and fairly ran across the hall and up the stairs. King's anx-

ious gaze followed her as she fled, and then a far-away look dawned in his eyes.

"On some happier occasion," he murmured to no one in particular, "*some one* is going to pay for this!"

"I'd like to question your prisoner, inspector," announced Fenwick.

"Very well. He says his name is Nick Napolielo and that he does n't know a soul in this house. I don't believe a word he says."

"Nick," began Fenwick, "why did you take Mr. King's car?"

"Joy-ride. Tha's all, boss. I t'ink, mabbe, I get my girl, I tak-a her leetle ride. Then this mans, he's a-chase me, so I keep goin'."

"Do you expect me to believe that your girl would accompany you on an automobile ride at four o'clock in the morning?"

"Sure. Lucia, she's a go in an auto any time. She's a-crazy for machine."

"What were you going to do with the car when you finished your ride?"

"Justa leave some place. On da street, mabbe."

Since the inception of the case the telephone had played so evil a part that the aversion to



it which Willmer so consistently displayed had been communicated in a lesser degree to all the others. Every time it rang the sudden hush and uneasiness that followed was dramatic.

As Nick answered Fenwick's question the bell jangled furiously, and Corson jumped from his chair. Boyden half arose, and Fenwick wheeled about, facing the instrument, and then stood motionless. King stretched languidly, both hands in his trouser-pockets, and yawned with affected boredom. The prisoner looked from one to another, bewildered, and then laughed.

"Ah, gee! Whassa matt'?" he demanded. "She 's no gonna hurt you!"

"Go to the switchboard, Seth," ordered Fenwick; and the little man silently slipped from the room. Charlie lifted the receiver to his ear, and Corson stood at his elbow as if he hoped to hear fragments of the caller's conversation.

"Mr. Willmer's residence, Bell speaking," announced Fenwick.

"This is Willmer," answered the financier. "Come up to my den when you get time, will you?"

"I'll be right up, sir." He replaced the receiver on the hook.

"It was Mr. Willmer," he advised. "He wants to see me. Where's Nick?"

"Damn it! He's gone!" barked Corson, flying to the door, which he slammed violently as he left the house.

Charlie regarded King quizzically.

"Well?" inquired King.

"Where's Nick?" asked Fenwick quietly. "Is he still in the house?"

The junior member of the triumvirate appeared to be disconcerted by the young wire-chief's manner.

"He left by the front entrance when you answered the telephone."

"Didn't you know enough to stop him?"

"You forget that I am now Inspector Corson's deputy. I was merely awaiting orders from my chief."

Boyden reappeared and immediately noted Nick's disappearance.

"Where's that Italian feller?" he demanded.

"Mr. King permitted him to walk out while I was telephoning," advised Fenwick. "Corson is out looking for him."

"I 'll do some lookin' myself," exclaimed Seth, making for the door. As it closed after him Fenwick again turned to King.

"This won't do at all," he announced. "Corson has real evidence against you, and can make things decidedly unpleasant if he cares to. What object had you in furthering his escape?"

"I did n't want to see the poor devil suffer for a mere lark," protested King earnestly. "I believe his story about taking the car for a joy-ride."

"Your position is obviously unfair," pointed out Fenwick. "I am endeavoring to assist you and your associates, and have taken you into my confidence. For some inexplicable reason you are now obstructing Corson's investigation and impeding my own efforts. The absurdity of your excuse for permitting Nick's escape is patent. Are you going to force me to subscribe to Corson's theory? Am I to believe that yours is one of the voices?"

"I hope not, old chap," responded King, "You know perfectly well that I had nothing to do with Pendleton Kirke's death. I give you my word that I have respected your confidence and have n't breathed a word to a

soul about Charlie Fenwick being on this case. But I can't for the life of me understand why Corson should suspect or endeavor to incriminate a chance passer-by who makes off with my motor-car."

"We will not argue, Mr. King," said Fenwick, disappointed. "You have ventured the opinion on a number of occasions that your partners knew more than they cared to tell about the voices. I am compelled to feel that your own position does not differ materially from theirs. When you feel at liberty to divulge such information as you have, I shall feel it incumbent on me to resume the frank attitude that is due an honest client. Until then, my methods, progress, and all other actions will be directed toward completing this case for Mr. Reeves of the telephone company, who is alone responsible for my assignment to it."

Riggs answered the door and admitted Corson and Boyden just as Willmer strode into the room. The financier halted as he sensed a constrained attitude on the part of the occupants.

"What's the row, gentlemen?" he inquired.

"He got away," advised Corson, addressing



Fenwick and ignoring Willmer. "Probably boarded a passing bus. Boyden and I scouted around for several blocks but saw nothing of him."

"Mr. King's car was stolen early this morning, Mr. Willmer," informed Fenwick. "Inspector Corson's men caught the fellow and brought him here. The inspector believed him to be more than a common thief. While we were conferring in this room he escaped."

"Escaped from four able-bodied men?" queried Willmer. "How?"

"Your brilliant partner permitted him to make a get-away while you were talking to Bell over the telephone," answered Corson bitterly.

"Who? When?" demanded Willmer in staccato tones. "I have n't been talking to Bell."

"Neither he has," put in Boyden. "I listened in at the switchboard, and, while the voice sounded like Mr. Willmer, the call was from outside the house!"

## CHAPTER X

### THE TWELFTH HOUR

**H**IS face drawn and haggard, Willmer paced the room nervously, while Corson, Boyden, King, and Fenwick regarded him mutely and uncomfortably. They fully realized the terrific strain he was under, and even Corson felt sorry for him. The financier had passed a sleepless night, but had regained some semblance of control over his nerves in the morning.

In his characteristic manner, curt and decisive, he had cabled the news of Kirke's death to the wife and daughter in France, had arranged for the care of the body of his late partner, and, in lieu of eagerly sought interviews by the newspaper men, had issued a general statement to the press. Now, clad in somber mourning garb, ashen-hued of countenance, he walked up and down the room as if he were alone, a broken, hopeless, distraught man.

Riggs appeared in the doorway, standing aside to let Miss Carewe precede him into the room. As she entered, Willmer threw back his shoulders, as if struggling to master his emotions, and forced a wan smile.

"My dear," he said simply, taking both her hands in his, "I've scarcely seen you to-day. Were you equal to the task of getting off those messages? If you were n't, don't bother. I'll have Kavanagh run up from the office and take care of them."

"The letters have gone," she assured him, "and I would welcome any additional work you might give me. I should like to have something to occupy my mind and time. Can I be of any further assistance to you?"

A slow, negative shake of the head answered her. Then he said: "I've been thinking that it would be a fine thing for you to get away for a few weeks. The Trents, perhaps—or you could visit Dot Cameron, in South Orange. This is scarcely a proper atmosphere for a girl like you. We seem to be living in an environment that I believed was peculiar to the dime novel. You're not looking well, my child. A month of hikes

and rides through the South Mountain Reservation, with some country-club activities in the evening, would banish the constantly serious, care-worn expression I've noticed lately. What do you say?"

"I say no," she answered unhesitatingly, "It is my duty to repay you for the care and the home you have given me. My father's daughter would never run away from trouble, and right now I must be here where I can help. These gentlemen, Mr. Bell and Mr. Corson, will tell you that I have helped. Why, even now, I have brought Riggs here because he knows something that may help us."

"Indeed?" queried Willmer, noticing the servant for the first time. "What is it, Riggs?"

"It's about the person who just escaped, sir. I understand that he claimed he knew no one in this house, and had merely been passing by when he conceived the notion of—er—borrowing Mr. King's car. So I have just been telling Miss Carewe that the man had been in this house before."

"What?" demanded Willmer. "When was this?"



“Early this morning, sir. After I had shown the gentlemen to their rooms, and every one was retiring, I was making the rounds, assuring myself that the doors and windows were properly fastened. As I was about to secure the front doors this Italian chap sauntered down the stairs, cap in hand and a cigarette in his mouth.

“‘Match?’ he says to me, cool enough.

“I was so taken by surprise I hastened to oblige him. He struck the match, lit the cigarette, and walked past me. It was not until he was half-way out of the house that I grew suspicious.

“‘Who have you been seeing, sir?’ I asked, knowing I had not admitted him.

“‘Mr. Willmer,’ says he. ‘I’m from the telephone company. Good night.’

“With that he shuts the door and goes down the steps. I finished locking up, and then went to my room. He must have waited outside for about five minutes, sir, for it was fully that long before I heard Mr. King’s car pull away from the house.”

“Were n’t you suspicious then?” asked Fenwick?

“No, sir. There have been so many strange

happenings lately that I'm afraid to question anything that occurs."

Willmer dropped into a chair weakly, moistening his lips.

"Did this man really call on you, Mr. Willmer?" asked Corson.

"No," murmured the financier faintly.

"Do you know anything about him, Bell?"

"Not a thing," responded Fenwick.

"I shall not compel Mr. King to lie by asking him the same question," announced Corson. "It is logical to conclude that the man who allowed him to escape is the man he came to see."

"Thoughtful of you," rejoined King, "but I'm not tremendously interested in gaining your good opinion. I am accountable to my partner for my actions, however, and feel that the occasion demands that I register a denial in his presence. Mr. Willmer, to my knowledge I never saw this man until I found him in possession of my car at the Grand Central this morning."

"That is all that is necessary, Otis," advised Willmer. "I believe you, my boy."

"You are too gullible, Mr. Willmer," warned Corson. "The fellow who escaped

knows something about Pendleton Kirke's death and is undoubtedly the owner of one of the voices."

"I should like to ask Riggs," piped up Boyden, "whether this Eyetalian talked with a foreign accent when he was leavin' the house this morning?"

"No, sir, he did not," answered Riggs respectfully. "He talked as well as you or I."

"Did you make a search to see if he took anything?" persisted the little man.

"Yes, sir. I am quite sure nothing is missing."

"That will do, Riggs, unless the gentlemen have some other questions to ask," advised Lorraine. Both Corson and Fenwick indicated that they had no desire to question him further, and Riggs withdrew. The girl turned to her guardian.

"I *have* been of assistance, have n't I?" she asked.

"Yes, my child; you have shown me that the voices have intruded on the privacy of my home. I am not safe anywhere. I am going to my den."

He raised himself feebly from the chair and walked slowly to the door, where he hesitated.

"Bell," he said, as if deliberately to snub Corson, "I am relying on you. You promised to clear this matter up within forty-eight hours. You've been on the case twelve hours. If you can prevent further startling developments during the next thirty-six, and can end this devilish business, I may be able to live through it. Do your best, will you?"

"I will, of course," assured Fenwick. "The case was mysterious enough when I took it, but the developments of the last twelve hours have been extremely so. Each new occurrence, however, despite the element of mystery, has contributed to the support of a general theory I have formed. I am more than pleased at the progress I have made, and expect to have a satisfactory solution of the whole affair very soon. In the mean time I can positively assure you that there is not the slightest chance of any one doing you physical injury."

"I am not so sure," commented Willmer, turning on his heel and slowly making his way up-stairs.

"You are very reassuring, Mr. Bell," observed Lorraine gratefully. "If I thought Mr. Willmer was really in danger, I would urge you to plead with him to give up the



fight. I imagine it is all a question of money, and he has so much more than he needs.”

“You are suggesting that he buy off the voices?” asked Fenwick.

She nodded.

“What if a principle is at stake?” she inquired defensively. “Mr. Willmer’s happiness and peace of mind are worth a great deal, not only to him, but to others. If I felt for a moment that the voices were responsible for Mr. Kirke’s death, I would for ever reproach myself for not having urged my employer to give in. How much it would have meant to Olive and to Mrs. Kirke if money could have prevented this tragedy!”

“Feminine logic,” commented Corson. “Willmer’s a big man—the kind who will fight for a principle. He realizes the duty he owes to society, and will not encourage blackmail. Despite his discourtesy to me, I admire him for the stand he has taken.”

“You do not read character well, Mr. Corson,” disagreed the girl. “From my knowledge of the triumvirate, I would say that the only member of it genuinely interested in ethics and willing to fight for a principle is in this room. Next to him I should place Mr.

Kirke. As for Mr. Willmer, he would wage war to the bitter end, not because character and right were involved, but because of money. Wealth is his god. I do not consider it disloyal to him to acquaint you with these facts. It is his one big human failing. In everything else he is a superman."

"But Mr. Willmer is quite a philanthropist," protested Corson.

"Not at all," Lorraine advised. "The triumvirate supports certain worthy charities, and Messrs. King and Kirke often made contributions from their personal funds. Mr. Willmer never did. This information is not public property, and I trust you will regard it as confidential. It seemed my duty to acquaint you with it. If you fail to relieve the situation in any other way, I think you should persuade Mr. Willmer that his only hope lies in negotiating with the voices and buying them off."

"It is my opinion that we should begin bargaining at once," announced Corson, "but not in good faith. Such tactics eventually lead to some sort of contact with the culprits and often afford an opportunity to take them into custody."

"I fear you underestimate the ability of this gang, chief," observed Fenwick. "Just postpone the operation of that plan for another day, and give me a chance to work out my own theory."

Corson shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you think, Otis?" asked Lorraine.

"You've probably given Mr. Bell information about Mr. Willmer which he should have had long ago," agreed King. "Now that he has it he should be given an opportunity to use it. The voices have been acquainted with every move we have made. They will merely laugh at the notion of bargaining along the lines suggested by Mr. Corson, if I am a judge."

"You appear to have rather definite information as to their reactions," Corson pointed out caustically.

"Why should n't I?" retorted King. "Is n't it your theory that I sing tenor in their quartet?"

"Don't tease, Otis," begged Lorraine. "Why don't you tell the inspector all you know and coöperate with him."

"I'm perfectly willing to, Lorraine, in all

that immediately concerns the subject we are discussing. The inspector refuses to coöperate, however, since he will not permit me to draw the line between what I know to be pertinent and what is not."

"Oh, you men!" exclaimed Lorraine, perplexed. She left the room.

"What do you think about Nick telling Riggs he was from the telephone company?" asked Corson.

Fenwick smiled.

"I've been thinking about that," he admitted. "Of course, it was an explanation that Riggs would be very likely to accept, in view of recent occurrences, and Nick undoubtedly knew this. On the other hand the statement may warrant further investigation. Seth, I'm going to leave it to you to discover whether or not Nick is or ever was a telephone man. Get busy."

"Right," assented Seth, who had listened intently to the entire conversation. "As it says in the fifth chapter of Ezra, verse fifteen, 'Search may be made in the book of the records.' I'll start right away."

"And, Seth," continued Fenwick as the little man started from the room, "tell that



Riverside wire-chief to get busy on the voltmeter test if he has n't already done so."

"Very well," agreed Boyden.

"Where does Boyden have to go?" queried Corson.

"Riverside central office on West Eighty-ninth Street first," advised Fenwick. "Then he may have to go to the central testing bureau on West Fifty-eighth Street, and perhaps to the headquarters building on Dey Street."

"Perhaps Mr. King would drive him down in the car," suggested the inspector. "It would save a lot of time."

"Gladly," consented King.

"If you 'll come back here you may be able to assist me," Corson advised.

"Never fear," responded the young financier. "I 'll be back. I have n't the slightest reason for running away."

"A millionaire can't run away, Mr. King."

"Oh, so you know that, too, do you?" smiled King understandingly, as he left with Boyden.

As the pair left the house Fenwick quickly turned to Corson.

"You wanted to get rid of King," he accused. "Why?"

"I wanted to talk to you about him. We rode down from the Grand Central in his car. We were crowded; it's one of those speed-buggies. Nick sat on my knee, and Boyden rode on the running-board, while King drove. Nick had an excellent opportunity to whisper to King, and took advantage of it. King's manner changed from that moment, and, while he endeavored to assume his usual attitude of bored indifference, I could see that he was worried. I'd give anything to know what Nick said to him."

"Interesting," commented Fenwick, non-committally.

Corson regarded him with disgust.

"Is that all you have to say?" he demanded.

"That's all," smiled Charlie. "I'm not going to venture the opinion that King is one of the voices or is directing them. I'm not going to make a similar statement regarding Nick, and I'm quite sure neither of them are implicated in Pendleton Kirke's death. You've had too many theories, inspector, and have had to give each one up in turn as you adopted a new one. My theory has assumed shape very slowly, but I still find it tenable, and I mean to stick to it."

“When you find it untenable, Charlie, I ’m going to attempt to dicker with the voices, and I ’ll wager I make an arrest.”

“Good enough!” agreed Charlie. “Don’t attempt it, however, until my theory *is* untenable. In the mean time, you ought to devote all your time to solving the mystery of Pendleton Kirke’s death.”

Corson glared at him half savagely.

“You want me to ask you outright how that trick was pulled,” he growled. “Well, I ’m not going to do it. If you could find out, so can I. I ’m going back to Newton. When King returns tell him to join me at Kirke’s place. So-long.”

## CHAPTER XI

### A TRICK THAT FAILED

FENWICK remained at the Willmer residence until King returned with the news that Boyden was conferring with certain plant-department supervisors of the telephone company in an endeavor to identify Nick as a telephone man.

"Corson wants you to go out to Newton," said Charlie.

"The estimable Mr. Corson does not always get what he wants," commented King. "I have things to do at Forest Hills, and if he'd like to see me he may call at my home. Have you lunched?"

"No; I've been waiting to deliver Corson's message to you and have n't heard a word about luncheon from Riggs."

King consulted his watch.

"One o'clock. Why not run down to the Ibis Club with me? Things are more or less confused about this establishment just now,



and the usual daily routine has apparently been disturbed. Will you join me?"

Fenwick assented, and after acquainting Riggs with their plans the two men drove to the famous and exclusive club-house in King's car. Despite the fact that King was the junior member of the triumvirate, he appeared to be regarded with considerable deference and respect by the geniuses of finance who frequented the club.

"That big, homely-looking chap with the small, twinkling eyes is Vandermill, president of the Union Reserve Bank," informed King. "The others at his table are Worthenberg, who controls most of the South American copper output; Bates, the automobile man; and Hill, the head of the moving-picture industry. If Mr. Willmer were lunching here to-day, and saw those four with their heads together, he would tell you what was brewing financially in much the same manner that you deduce significant things from telephone calls. I've heard him make predictions of that nature on many occasions, and in two or three days the newspapers would confirm them."

"I can easily understand that," nodded

Fenwick. "In spite of the unfavorable and abnormal conditions of my contact with Mr. Willmer, I have seen enough of him to know that his is an unusual mind. To follow a generally accepted theory, that mind was given to him as compensation for some less desirable quality. I have been trying to identify the negative quality and had almost decided that it was cowardice when Miss Carewe proceeded to shed some light on it this morning.

"I understand from her remarks that your partner is a potential miser. Such at least is her interpretation of certain of his actions and reactions. While I do not entirely subscribe to it, I have concluded that the proper diagnosis of Mr. Willmer's trouble, failing, or what you will, is a combination of my theory and Miss Carewe's."

"You've hit it!" exclaimed King enthusiastically. "You've expressed it remarkably well, too. What you mean, I take it, is that Willmer is not a miser to the extent of being parsimonious, or a coward to the extent of fearing to take chances. You don't think, for instance, that he would lament if he lost a gigantic wad in some legitimate venture. [You believe, however, that he fears

losing part or all of his resources in some manner which will give him no chance at all.”

“Precisely. At the same time I must congratulate you on your very apt description of my new theory.”

A very efficient waiter took their orders and served them with remarkable promptness. During the luncheon King pointed out various club members of national and international prominence, the young criminologist listening and observing with unusual interest.

“If you are successful in this case,” King predicted, “Willmer will find you half a dozen clients among the men in this room.”

“Detective agency work,” commented Fenwick. “You forget that I’m a wire-chief. I have n’t time for the cases requiring endless investigations, shadowing, and the other stereotyped police methods. Of course, I never refuse any case that interests me, but when I accept one I try to do my investigating and shadowing by telephone.”

“To say nothing of recovering jewels!” boomed a huge voice behind Fenwick. “Charlie Fenwick, as I live, and with Otis King, too!”

Charlie turned, to find Diamond Jim Ordway at his elbow. The millionaire whose penchant for jewelry had earned him wide publicity placed a hand affectionately on Fenwick's shoulder.

"How do you do, sir!" greeted Fenwick, somewhat pleasurably embarrassed. "My name happens to be John Bell, and I'd thank you not to call me by any other for the present. I trust that you had no further trouble safe-guarding your famous collection."

"None, my boy, since you saved it for me. So your name is John Bell. Have I put my foot into it generally? I hope King isn't your quarry?"

"Not a bit of it," protested King. "At least, not to my knowledge. Perhaps I've merely deluded myself into the belief that Bell has been retained by me."

"Well, if he's working for you, let me predict right now that your troubles are ended when this wizard of the wires takes the trail. You promised to call on me whenever you came to the big town," he reminded Fenwick reproachfully. "Have you forgotten?"

"I have not, sir, and, while I'm tremendously busy, I've been meaning to look you



up. My visit will not be purely social," he warned. "I'm going to ask you to help me with something."

"Delighted!" assured Ordway. "I owe you anything you may ask for. Drop in at my office to-morrow before four o'clock."

"I'll do that," Fenwick assured him.

Diamond Jim shook hands with the two and departed.

"I had forgotten that you knew at least one of our members," observed King. "You made Ordway your friend for life when you recovered his jewels."

"I wish he had n't been so noisily cordial," frowned Charlie, as he noted the interested glances leveled in his direction and the whispered comment at other tables.

"So do I," muttered King. "All the financial world will know that Fenwick is on the job."

A uniformed page stopped at the table and addressed King.

"Your guest, Mr. Bell, is wanted on the telephone," he advised.

Fenwick arose and followed the boy to a booth.

"Bell speaking," he announced.

"This is Willmer, Bell. Lorraine received a message from the Camerons at South Orange shortly after you left. It seemed rather urgent, and she left immediately. I telephoned the Camerons, asking them to have her call me as soon as she arrived, and learned that the message purporting to come from them was bogus. There's some deviltry afoot, and I thought it best to let you know at once."

"You want me to follow her out to Jersey?" asked Fenwick.

"I think it best; don't you?"

"Undoubtedly. I'll start right away."

"Good enough. Bring her back with you if you can."

Fenwick hung up the receiver and returned to the table, where he advised King of the nature of the conversation. The young man's face paled, and he jumped to his feet.

"So they're after Lorraine now," he muttered. "Let's not delay. We can motor out, and by breaking a few speed laws we'll save time. Come along."

"Just a moment, Mr. King," protested Fenwick. "I haven't finished my story. Miss Carewe is in no danger, or, if she is, it

is n't in South Orange. I'm never fooled twice where a voice is concerned. The man who just pretended to be Willmer is the one who impersonated him when Nick escaped to-day."

"But—why—er—are you sure?" demanded King, entirely at sea.

"Positive," assured Charlie. "Some one is interested in getting us out of the way. We might verify the story in a few minutes by telephoning Willmer, but he would be unwilling to answer the telephone, and we'd only lose time. Drive back to Willmer's right away."

King signed the check, and the two hastened to the waiting car. It was merely a matter of minutes before they halted at the Riverside Drive mansion. As Riggs admitted them they caught a glimpse of Lorraine Carewe as she passed out of sight at the head of the staircase. King whistled softly.

"By Jove! You were right," he averred.

"Where's Mr. Willmer, Riggs?" demanded Fenwick.

"He's sitting in an easy-chair in his den, sir, fast asleep. His revolver is beside him on the table. I've been reluctant about ap-

proaching him, sir, and, besides, the sleep will do him good. He's slept for two hours."

"And Miss Carewe?"

Riggs lowered his voice in replying.

"Something is worrying her, sir. A ragged urchin called about the time you left, and insisted on seeing Mr. Bell. He refused to leave, so I called Miss Lorraine. I didn't hear what was said, but she gave the boy some money and he left. She's been busy with a pencil and some scraps of paper ever since, sir, and, as I just informed you, seems troubled."

"Thank you, Riggs. Come along, Mr. King."

The two rushed up the stairs and halted at the library door. Lorraine sat at the large table, her brows furrowed, and regarded with perplexity an uninviting scrap of paper and an envelope. She sighed with relief as she looked up and beheld Fenwick.

"Do come here, Mr. Bell," she begged. "I've been worried to death, and I fear I've transgressed on the social niceties by opening your mail. A boy brought this envelope to the house about two hours ago. It's Mr. Boyden's writing, isn't it? You see, I re-



member it from the list of telephone-numbers I reviewed with him."

Fenwick took the proffered envelope. It was extremely dirty and appeared to have been trod upon by muddy boots. Beneath the defacing marks he could decipher, in Boyden's familiar scrawl, the words:

\$10 reward for delivery of this envelope to Mr. John Bell, ——— Riverside Drive, New York City.

"A boy brought it," advised Lorraine. "I paid him, and, as it seemed to hint of danger, I opened it. This was inside."

The scrap of paper she handed him had evidently been torn from a wall. On it was scrawled with the stub of a pencil the following cryptic communication:

Tbl Under Gd. in Y. Hs. E. 13. Bet. Sch. and Pk x G.B.Ax D.C. without E K and Auto x Pty we are L K is on G x Inc. B|W Str. and Aly x Dpd. Ltr. O. Rd. x Pay Mg. Chgs.

"What do you make of it?" asked Fenwick, addressing Lorraine.

"Nothing at all," she confessed. "It's—

it's sort of terrifying. Some sort of a code, is n't it?"

"Probably. Nothing to worry about, at any rate. Mr. King and I will go over it and try to decipher it. Any new developments?"

"Two calls from the voices, asking for Mr. Willmer. I answered, and got rid of them without disturbing Mr. Willmer, who is still sleeping. One call was from a man of apparent refinement and education, but was the most sinister of any I have heard since we were first annoyed. The other was a drawling, masculine voice, exceedingly English in tone, enunciation, and vocabulary."

"They refused to enter into extended conversation with you, I presume?"

She nodded confirmation.

"Did you receive a message of any kind from the Camerons of South Orange?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I was advised that you had. It's of no consequence, however. Mr. King and I have an errand to do. If you receive any more calls while we are away, try to make the conversations as extended as possible, One

chance slip may betray one of the voices and solve our whole problem."

Miss Carewe walked up to Fenwick, an appealing, worried look in her eyes.

"You are not fooling me one bit, Mr. Bell," she announced. "Mr. Boyden is in grave danger, and you are going to try to help him. Your manner, when you examined his note, told me as much. I'm sorry—truly sorry. He's a quaint, whimsical, good old man, and I've learned to like him. Can't I be of some assistance? Take me with you; I may be able to help."

"You can help best," advised Fenwick, "by remaining here. It would n't do to leave Mr. Willmer with no one but the servants. Seth is in trouble, but he has apparently established the first real contact with the voices. I hope to bring him back with me, and to obtain some definite information from him which will aid us materially. You take care of Mr. Willmer."

"Very well," she asserted, but not without showing her disappointment. She gripped King's arm. "Be very careful, Otis," she pleaded. "Don't take any foolish risks.

You, too, Mr. Bell," she added, in a very obvious afterthought.

"You're growing positively melodramatic, Lorry," protested King. Fenwick winced at the use of the affectionate diminutive. "That confounded note has upset you. Best forget it. I'm sure I don't know what it's all about, but if Bell is off after big game I'm with him. We'll bring you home a trophy. Good-by for a bit."

She watched them from an upper window as they drove off in King's car.

"Where to?" inquired Otis.

"East Thirteenth Street."

"When do we decipher Boyden's message?"

"I have decoded it. He merely used a standard code of abbreviations observed by all telephone companies in recording information on trouble-reports and toll-tickets. It was quite ingeniously put together, however. I'll read it to you." He produced the scrap of wall paper and read:

"Trouble. Under guard in yellow house East Thirteenth, between school and park. Get better address. Don't come without emergency key and automatic—or automobile. Party we are looking



for is on ground. Incoming both ways, street and alley. Dropped letter open road. Pay messenger charges."

"Intelligible in spots," commented King. "Interpret the whole thing, if you don't mind."

"It's plain enough," explained Fenwick. "Boyden is being held a prisoner by Nick in a yellow house on East Thirteenth Street, somewhere between a school and a park. He asks me to bring a skeleton-key so that we can be sure of gaining entrance. He also suggests that we attempt entrance simultaneously by a street door and by another leading from a side or rear alley. 'Auto' is an abbreviation for 'automobile,' and also for 'automatic.' We are bringing both. He dropped the message out of a window on the chance of some one delivering it, and requests that we pay the promised reward to the messenger."

"Sounds quite reasonable," agreed King. "Do you know East Thirteenth Street?"

"No," confessed Fenwick.

"Well, I know how to get there, but I have n't an idea of the location of this park and school."

They rode in silence for a time, and, as they turned a corner, King announced: "This is

it. Not particularly vicious-looking, either. Three yellow houses on this block, and a total absence of schools and parks."

"Looks like a school about two blocks down," indicated Fenwick.

"Right-o—and just beyond it at the next corner is a tiny park. The fifth house from the school, I should judge."

He halted in front of the ancient dwelling, a two-story frame affair which had once been painted yellow. The weather had taken its toll, however, and only an optimist would have described the house by that color.

"There's an alley of sorts at the side of the house," whispered King.

Fenwick nodded and thrust an automatic revolver into the financier's hand.

"Go around to the alley door and bang on it with your fist," he commanded. "If any one answers, pretend you wish to purchase the property, and keep up a conversation. I'll get in the front way, in the mean time."

They parted, and Fenwick ran up the five steps from the sidewalk. Not until then did he notice a "House to Let" sign at the side of the door, directly over an electric push-button. He pulled a key-ring from his

pocket, made a hasty selection, and fitted a key into the lock. It opened immediately. Leaving the door ajar, he walked through the uncarpeted hallway, glancing into rooms to the right and left. The house was apparently unoccupied. As he retracted his steps to a stairway leading to the second floor, he could hear King knocking on the side door.

He ascended the stairs and pushed open the first door he encountered. The room was simply but tastefully furnished with painted furniture, but was somewhat untidy. Peering in, he beheld his assistant gagged and bound to a small iron cot. He dashed to Seth's side and, whipping out a knife, released him.

"Phew!" exclaimed Seth, spitting out the gag.

"Nick? Where is he?" demanded Fenwick.

Boyden shook his head slowly.

"Gone. No need o' rushing." He rubbed his arms and legs to restore circulation, and then walked stiffly up and down the room. Stopping in front of a door he threw it open and revealed a small clothes-closet.

"Jest look in there," he invited.

Fenwick did. Attached to the wall were two telephone sets.

"Those aren't Bell system telephones," commented Fenwick. "Stromberg-Carlson equipment."

"Yep. And Heaven knows whose lines they are hooked up to. Mr. James Cartier, alias Nick Napolielo, is a telephone man, and then some! Who's that knockin'?"

"Otis King. I'll go down and let him in."

He ran down the stairs and soon returned with King. The two seated themselves on the cot, while Boyden continued to walk the floor, a look of unutterable disgust and chagrin upon his face.

"This looks like an artist's studio," observed King, glancing about.

"Do tell!" returned Seth. "Well, jest let me tell you he's an artist. And he's a college man! But, most of all, he's a telephone man!"

"How about the voices, Seth?" queried Fenwick.

"He's one o' the gang—no doubt about it! Why, he takes his orders from the boss o' the hull bunch!"



“And he put it all over you, did n’t he, Seth?” murmured Charlie, sympathetically.

“Kiddin’ me?” demanded Seth, much aggrieved. “Mark sixteen sixteen!”

Fenwick roared with laughter until Boyden grinned.

“That ’s the way Seth swears,” Fenwick advised King. “He tells me that the sixteenth chapter of Mark, sixteenth verse, contains the words ‘Be damned.’ ”

King joined in the laugh.

“Now that you ’ve announced the text,” he said, gravely, “suppose you give us the whole sermon.”

## CHAPTER XII

### SETH'S ADVENTURE

“**A**FTER you left me,” began Seth, nodding toward King, “I trotted around the plant department from one supervisor to another, describin’ Nick Napolielo and askin’ questions about him. Finally I run into a chap named Rogers who bossed a bunch of installers.”

“‘I know him,’ sez Rogers. ‘Jimmy Cartier’s his name.’

“Rogers then proceeds to describe him in more details and pertiklers ’n I could ever hope to. He said that Cartier was the best installer that ever worked for the company. He had formerly been employed as a combination man by a small independent company in the West. He was better educated than any installer that ever happened, and Rogers had an idea that he could have written E.E. after his name if he wanted to.”

“What’s E.E.?” demanded King.

“Electrical engineer,” replied Boyden. “Rogers said that Cartier gave all sorts of evidences of good bringin’ up, but he was no snob, and was well liked by the men he worked with. He was quite an entertainer, bein’ a good mimic, and very often he would keep the crowd laughin’ by imitatin’ some foreigner he had encountered in his day’s work. He could handle almost any kind o’ dialect, and Rogers says it was a real treat to hear him imitate an Italian tenor singin’ an operatic tune.

“ ‘Why did he leave the company?’ I asked.

“ ‘We don’t know,’ sez Rogers. ‘He called up one day an’ said he was through. I asked if he was dissatisfied or had gotten a better job, but he just kidded me along without tellin’ me a thing. That’s the last we ever heard of him.’”

“ ‘Where did he do most of his installin’?’ I asked.

“ ‘Riverside, Melrose, ’n’ Tremont,’ sez Rogers.

“I hustled down to the pay-roll department on Dey Street and looked up his record. Got his badge-number, address, ’n’ everything. Then I telephoned around a bit, and purty

soon I found out he had made installations of extension-stations at Warren Willmer's place!

"Ye c'n imagine how tickled I was. Rogers had told me that the feller could imitate almost any dialect, an' the voices talked in all sorts o' dialects. He had been in Willmer's home a number o' times. We were lookin' for an ex-telephone man.

"I went to the address the pay-roll people gave me. It was a furnished-room house on West Fourteenth Street. The lady who ran it told me that Cartier had n't lived there for six months. She did n't know his new address, 'ceptin' that it was on East Thirteenth Street, but she said her boy had been there a couple o' times. I got her to call the kid in, and he guided me here. I handed him a dollar, told him to make himself scarce, and then I looked over the ground.

"There wa'n't any signs of life, so I tried one o' my keys on the front door and got in without any trouble. Looked over the hull first floor and found it vacant. Then I come up here and opened that there door. I thought I heard voices, but there was no one in sight, so I started to poke around. All of



a sudden some one grabbed me from behind, tossed me on the bed, an' sat on me."

King chuckled and Fenwick grinned, while Boyden glared at them savagely.

"When ye git serious again, I 'll go on," he announced with dignity.

"That 's right, Seth; sit on us. You 're entitled to; Nick sat on you."

Fenwick's good nature could n't be denied, and Seth smiled, too, evidently mollified.

"I looked up and saw Nick; but it was a different Nick. He wore decent clothes and was clean and attractive-lookin'.

" 'So we meet again, Mr. Boyden,' sez he. 'You 're a fast worker. Will ye behave if I let ye sit up?'

"He weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds so it wa'n't any use in resistin' him. I nodded; so he got up, went over to the door, turned a key in the lock, and put it in his pocket.

" 'If you had called a little later,' sez he, 'you 'd have missed me. I 'm movin' to-day. Ye might as well set around 'n' visit with me until I finish packin'. What c'n I do fer you?'

"I told him I 'd like him to come back to

Warren Willmer's fer dinner this evening, but he jest laughed."

" 'Sorry,' he said, 'but I must plead a previous engagement.'

"Then his manner changed entirely.

" 'I don't know where you fit in, old man,' he announced, 'but you 'd better get out or the voices will get you. If you or Corson or the rest of your gang have any sense they 'll quit and advise Willmer to come across. Did you ever hear the story of the darky and the whip?'

"I told him I had n't.

" 'Well,' he sez, 'there was a darky drivin' a team o' mules along a country road, an' a country parson begged a ride. The nigger had a whip with a long lash on it, an' every time a fly lighted on a mule's ear he would flick it off. The parson commented on the accuracy with which he used the whip, and, pointing out a leaf on the end of a branch which they were approachin', asked him to flick it off. The darky did so. A few minutes later the parson pointed out a hornets' nest in a tree and requested a further demonstration of accuracy with the whip. The driver refused.

“ ‘ “I ’ll flick a fly off a mule’s ear, s&h,” he said, “an’ I ’ll flick a leaf off a tree—but a hornets’ nest! Lordy, man, a hornets’ nest is a *organization*.” ’ ”

“ ‘Well?’ sez I.

“ ‘Well,’ answers Cartier, ‘jest keep in mind that the voices are a *organization*!’ ”

“I did n’t answer him but jest sat here on the bed watchin’, as he went around the room gatherin’ up articles an’ puttin’ ’em in a little pile on the floor. He kept hummin’ all the time, an’ he certainly has got a fine voice.

“ ‘Where ’d you spring from when you jumped on me?’ I asked him.

“He threw open that closet door an’ pointed within.

“ ‘I was in there telephonin’ when you entered,’ sez he; ‘so I jest opened the door a crack and waited until you were in a good position fer me to surprise you. Come take a look.’ ”

“I accepted the invitation, and discovered those non-standard telephones hooked up to the wall, and a couple o’ telephone directories hangin’ f’m a hook.

“ ‘Stealin’ service?’ I asked him.

“ ‘Yep,’ he admits cheerfully. ‘Got to, in this line o’ business.’ ”

“ ‘Are those sets with battery?’ I inquired.

“ ‘Nope,’ he answers frankly. ‘I can’t ring the persons I call without central’s assistance.’

“I imagined from his manner that he knew what I was drivin’ at, but he did n’t say a word.

“ ‘You ’d do better stickin’ to the telephone business or goin’ on the stage,’ I told him.

“ ‘Thanks, awfully,’ he sez.

“Among the things he was pilin’ up on the floor were a lot of installers’ tools, some books and papers, and some phonograph-records. As he added a pair of five-and-a-half-inch diagonal pliers to the heap I asked him what he called them.

“ ‘Cutters,’ he informed me.

“ ‘How long since you left Ithaca?’ I shot at him.

“ ‘ ’Bout five years,’ he answers, and then bites his lip.

“ ‘*You* never worked for a Western company,’ sez I. ‘Over in Jersey they call those pliers “dials.” Out in the country they say “snips.” In New York City they call ’em “Swedes,” but Ithaca is the only place on the map where they call ’em “cutters.” ’

“ ‘Clever enough,’ he concedes. ‘ ’Tain’t



no use concealin' my home anyway. I'll be miles f'm here in a few hours. You must have had loads of experience in the telephone game to be so expert in the argot. What names do you know for the support used in raising poles?

"Ithaca calls it a 'corpse'; in Long Island it's a 'dead man'; in Manhattan-Bronx and in Buffalo it's a 'stiff,' while in Binghamton it's a 'stiff leg.'"

"'Right,' sez he. 'You're a dyed-in-the-wool telephone man. Care to look at a newspaper while you're waiting?'"

"He took one from his coat-pocket and handed it to me.

"'My eyes are poorly,' I lied.

"'Set over by the window, where you'll get more light,' he suggests.

"I did so, but I punched a hole through the paper with a lead-pencil so I could watch him while I pretended to read. He pulled a couple o' suit-cases out o' the closet and started to pack the stuff on the floor into them. When I got a chance I tore a loose piece of paper off the wall over there, and shielded behind the newspaper I wrote my note to you in code,

"All of a sudden he got up and went to one o' the 'phones in the closet. I could n't hear what number he called, because I was busy searching my pockets for an envelope. I found an old one, addressed it, and sealed my note up in it. Then, without turnin' around, I pushed the window up about half an inch and flipped the envelope out on the sidewalk. Puttin' the window down again, I was ready to pay some attention to Cartier's telephone-call.

" 'Ibis Club?' he was sayin'. 'Well, that means they'll probably be back. If you can get them out of town for half a day, I'll guarantee that the equipment will be safe from detection. Get one of the gang to call up the club, and send Bell and King off on a wild-goose chase. I'll take care of Corson and Boyden. Yes, boss; you can positively rely on me to do as I say. Good-by.'

"With that he hangs up the receiver and comes back to his suit-cases. As soon as he finishes packing he puts on his hat and comes over to me.

" 'I don't want to be unnecessarily rough,' he sez; 'but I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to submit to bein' temporarily disconnected.

I mean bound an' gagged,' he explained.

"I did n't stand no chance with him, so I figgered discretion to be the better part of valor. He sure bound me up shipshape, windin' up by lashin' me to the cot here. All the time he was doin' it he kept up a runnin' fire o' conversation.

" 'Tell those dime-novel sleuths that King did n't know a damn thing about me until he saw me in his car at the Grand Central. Tell them I put one over on King as we rode up in the car. Tell Mr. Bell he's got a long search on his hands. Advise Willmer to give up the fight; he does n't stand a chance. Sorry I can't take you with me. This is my farewell appearance. I'll see that you are released very soon. Good-by, old man, and beware of the voices!'

"With that he unlocked the door, and I heard him close it after him and run down the stairs. I lay here wonderin' what the chances were of my note bein' delivered. I wrote it in our standard code because I did n't know who might get it. I thought you'd never come, but here you are."

"The amiable Mr. Cartier apparently had no thought of harming you, Seth," commented

Fenwick. "What was it you wanted me to bring along—an automobile or an automatic?"

"Both," responded Boyden. "As you say, I don't think he would have harmed me; but I saw a revolver among his belongin's, and I don't imagine he would have submitted quietly if he was threatened with arrest."

"You've done a fine job, Seth," complimented Fenwick. "What do you consider the high spots in the new information you have obtained?"

Seth beamed at his superior's praise.

"Well, sir, in the first place, we've learned that Nick Napolielo is a very different man from what we thought. We've learned the identity of the feller who is givin' the voices the benefit of his expert knowledge of telephony. Next, we've found out that the gang has a leader, and that he's keepin' in touch with every move we make.

'We've also learned that Nick, or Cartier, could easily and successfully impersonate half a dozen persons over the telephone. That fact leads me to believe that the gang is smaller than we had supposed. F'm Cartier's telephone conversation with his boss, we



know that he must stand pretty close to the leader o' the gang. We also know that they are havin' some trouble with their telephone equipment, and that Cartier's prob'ly takin' care of it right now. I guess that's about all."

"A very fine summary of the facts," agreed Fenwick. "There's just one thing you've missed. While King and I were at the Ibis Club Mr. Willmer called me up and endeavored to have me go to South Orange, where he believed Miss Carewe to have been enticed by a bogus message. I knew the voice was not Willmer's, however, so we hurried up the Drive and found Miss Carewe at home and greatly worried by your code message.

"The call I received at the club was undoubtedly the one you heard Cartier suggest over that closet telephone, and the voice I heard was the voice of the man who called me to-day when Nick escaped from Willmer's. That proves that the gang numbers at least one other man who can imitate voices fairly creditably over the telephone."

"And that reduces the potential size of the gang some more," pointed out Seth.

"Right. We've seen Cartier, and as his

disguise was very superficial I think any of us would know him if we saw him again. The important thing, therefore, is to find Cartier, and I've an idea that we should look for him somewhere in the vicinity of Warren Willmer's home, where he is undoubtedly engaged in some sort of telephone activity."

The three men were startled by a subdued clicking sound emanating from the closet.

"It's the telephone," announced Fenwick, making his way to it. "He's got the bell muffled."

Lifting the receiver, he murmured "Hello." He could hear two persons in conversation.

"I've gotten the wrong number," asserted a male voice. "Please excuse it and hang up."

"Very well," assented a feminine voice; and Fenwick heard the click caused by the descending receiver. The masculine voice resumed conversation.

"Is that you, Bell?" he inquired.

"Yes. Who is speaking?"

"Nick Napolielo. Sorry I was n't at home when you called. I hope you released the old fellow and found him none the worse for his bonds."

"He's all right," answered Fenwick, puzzled and annoyed. "How did you know I was here?"

Cartier chuckled.

"Boyden thought he dropped that note out of the window without my knowledge. When I left the house I picked it up, read it, and decided to have it delivered. I sent a kid up to Willmer's with it, with instructions to say he had found it. I knew you'd be able to make it out; almost any telephone man or girl could have read it. And I didn't want to starve Boyden."

"Considerate of you. Anything else?"

"Yes; just one thing. Use your influence to get Willmer to submit, and everything will be fine. If you don't, your conscience is going to trouble you within forty-eight hours."

"That's a threat," exclaimed Fenwick.

"It's not a threat; it's a promise," corrected Cartier lightly. "Think it over."

Fenwick waited until assured that Cartier had hung up his receiver. Reëntering the room he acquainted King and Boyden with the details of the conversation. King was exceedingly nervous, while Boyden was unmistakably chagrined.

"This thing must not continue," declared King firmly. "It's getting positively uncanny, supernatural! The most expedient thing for us to do is to persuade Willmer to submit to the blackmail and have it over with."

"Willmer will never be persuaded," predicted Fenwick. "Furthermore, I don't like the suggestion to come from you."

The two young men gazed steadily at each other until King's eyes fell and he flushed uncomfortably.

"You've been fine, Mr. Fenwick," he declared sincerely. "You threatened to make me an utter outsider when I was placed in an embarrassing position to-day, but instead you've heaped coals of fire on my head by letting me in on everything. I can't however, understand why you are changing your attitude now."

"I'll tell you, Mr. King," Fenwick volunteered. "I changed my mind about barring you from my confidence because I felt that you were on the level and would do your best to demonstrate it. I know that Cartier whispered something to you this morning that apparently worried and intimidated you. He



has advised Boyden that he fooled you. Do you care to tell me how?"

King fidgeted nervously and hesitated.

"I—I simply can't!" he announced finally.

"Do you wonder, then, that I impugn your motives when you suggest that Willmer barter with blackmailers?"

Again King hesitated, evidently struggling mentally.

"No; damned if I do, Fenwick!" he decided. "It's beastly unfair of me, but I can't help it. The best thing for me to do is to stay away from you and keep my mouth shut, and that's what I'll do."

"Is that a proclamation of neutrality?" demanded Fenwick.

"Be careful!" warned King, angered at Fenwick's tone. "You know perfectly well that I've been on the right side of this thing from the start."

Fenwick shrugged his shoulders.

"Come along, Seth," he said. "We'll find a taxicab. Mr. King will ride alone."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE VOLTMETER TEST

“FOUR o’clock,” announced Fenwick as he and Boyden rode uptown in a taxicab, bound for the Riverside central office. “It’s been a busy afternoon. Tired, Seth?”

“Not a bit, Charlie. Seems to me when I’m workin’ on a case with you I never git tired till it’s finished. Then I feel peeved ’cause the excitement’s all over.”

“I imagine there’s plenty of excitement still in store for us. Things look decidedly brighter just now, however.”

“Why are you so keen on this voltmeter test, Charlie?”

“I’ll tell you, Seth. All of your investigations and attempts to trace the voices by means of the toll-tickets have failed. That would seem to point to the fact that the gang uses local calls exclusively; in other words, they telephone from within the city.

“It is highly improbable, however, that

they called Pendleton Kirke from telephones in Newton, or that they called Otis King from stations served by the Boulevard central office. A stranger in a small community invariably excites suspicion, and the gang would not run unnecessary risks. Despite the fact that we cannot trace the calls to Newton and Forest Hills, I have a number of reasons for believing that all the calls originate in New York."

"And what are those reasons, Charlie?"

"The ringing is the first one. I don't know whether you noticed it, but on each occasion that one of these calls was received at Willmer's something peculiar about the ringing attracted my attention. New York City has machine ringing; once the connection is established, the called party's bell will ring automatically at regular intervals until the 'phone is answered. The ringing on Willmer's 'phone was irregular, just as it is in Springfield, where the operator does it instead of a machine. You had that thought in mind when you asked Cartier if those sets in his closet were with battery, did n't you?"

"Yes, I did," acknowledged Boyden.

"Cartier, however, did n't require any ring-

ing apparatus for those two stations in his closet, because he didn't fear detection and could depend on the usual machine ringing when he made a call. My second reason is that early this morning when we tried to trace a call received at Willmer's by calling the operator on another trunk, we were told that no one was calling River 11,980. What did that suggest to you?"

Boyden admitted that the fact puzzled him, but that he could not explain it.

"To me, Seth, it indicated that some one was calling Willmer over his own wire. Can't you see it? Imagine some one cutting in an instrument on Riverside 11,980, somewhere in the vicinity of Willmer's home. It would have to be a magneto set with battery, equipped with condenser.

"If it didn't have a condenser, the operator could come in every time the fellow lifted the receiver, and sooner or later the man would be detected. He could even have a double-throw switch, and by throwing it one way could cut out the central office line and stand no chance of detection. Then he could ring, Willmer would answer, and it would appear to be a regularly handled call,"



"Charlie," exclaimed Seth, "you've hit it! Practically every call Willmer's been receivin' has been made over his own wire. The feller may even be next door to him or just around the corner. 'Nother thing: the calls to King and Kirke were prob'ly made from the same instrument, with the switch thrown the other way to let the operator in on them."

"Exactly, Seth. The fellow would ask for Boulevard 5381, and the operator would handle the call as coming from Willmer's 'phone, and would write a toll-ticket charging the call to River 11,980. That's why you could n't trace calls to Forest Hills and Newton by means of the toll-tickets. You did n't have the exact time the calls were received by Kirke or King, and you'd never think of questioning calls to them from Willmer's telephone."

"The nerve of 'em, Charlie!" grinned Boyden. "Jest think of raisin' the Old Harry with a man and his partners over his own 'phone, and makin' him pay for it!"

"Cartier evidently has nerve as well as ability, Seth."

"Sure has. When you asked me to arrange for a voltmeter test, I figured you were

aimin' to discover a plain case of wire-tappin' for the purpose of listenin' in. I never gave a thought to any one makin' actual use o' the circuit."

"I know some one who's sharper than you, Seth. Miss Carewe asked me this morning if it would be possible for a wire-tapper to send messages over Willmer's wire. She's been piecing things together, and quite logically hit upon that as a probable answer. She's a wonderfully intelligent girl, Seth."

"And as good as she's smart, Charlie. Purty easy to look at too."

He surveyed Fenwick shrewdly, a knowing twinkle in his eyes, but the young wire-chief ignored the remark completely.

"I'm banking on the Riverside wire-chief to prove my theory for me," he continued hastily. "You and I know that the condenser acts as a barrier to direct current. The line circuit at the central office is always set to receive a call from the subscriber; if the circuit is not in use, and if the condenser was not in the ringer circuit, the signal in the central office would remain operated through the ringer circuit. Cartier would not want the operator to come in on the wire at any time

that he was talking to Willmer, so it's a certainty that he's provided a condenser for his station. If a voltmeter test of Riverside 11,980 is made, I believe it will show an extra condenser on the line."

"We'll see," commented Boyden. "What were you tryin' to do to Otis King?"

"I was trying to get him so angry that he'd talk, Seth. One can scarcely blame Corson for suspecting him."

"I figger him to be harmless, Charlie."

"He may be, but I have an idea that he can give us valuable information if he cares to."

The taxicab halted in front of the Riverside central office on Eighty-ninth Street. Seth paid the chauffeur, tipping him conservatively and at the same time observing that the taxi company was strictly obeying the injunction to be found in the twenty-ninth chapter of Exodus, twenty-first verse. Failing to arouse the chauffeur's curiosity, Seth volunteered the information that the aforesaid book and verse contained the words, "Charge the people."

"Mebbe so," responded the stolid, slow-witted driver. "I'll ask the boss about it some time. G'night."

They made their way to the fire and moisture proof terminal-room, where immense ceiling-high frames receive and distribute the many wires in an orderly manner, so that each is readily accessible if the electrician is required to work on it.

On a galley resembling an iron fire-escape several men were busy joining wires to other pairs leading to the central office switchboard on the upper floor. Other members of the wire-chief's force were engaged in investigating and replacing burnt-out fuses, for each line has an individual fuse to guard against an overcharge of electricity.

They found Pierson, the wire-chief, supervising some work on "relays," the little devices which operate and automatically light the tiny signal-lamps in front of the operator. These signals indicate to her calls demanding her immediate attention.

Pierson was a man of about forty, with extremely dark hair, skin, and eyes. His outstanding characteristic was taciturnity. As he noticed them enter he nodded briefly and made for his desk.

"Make that test?" inquired Boyden.

Again he nodded.



"Learn anything?"

"Yes. Like to see it yourself?"

"If it's not too much trouble," assented Fenwick.

Pierson put on his head-set, pushed a button which connected him with an operator upstairs, and said:

"Put up 11,980."

A tiny signal-lamp lighted, which indicated that the test-cord had been placed in the jack. On the upper part of the wire-chief's desk was the voltmeter, and this now held the attention of all three. The voltmeter consists of a delicately balanced coil of wire swinging on jeweled bearings between the poles of a permanent magnet. Spiral springs are arranged to hold the coil in a certain position and to return it to this position if it should be turned away from it. To this coil of wire is rigidly attached a light aluminum pointer which passes before a paper scale graduated in divisions and number from 0 to 60.

When no current flows through the small coil of wire the pointer points to zero. In testing, the movement of the pointer indicates to the experienced wire-chief whether current is "leaking," i. e., flowing off the line.

It is also used to determine the nature of the trouble if a subscriber's line is out of order, and in case of toll-lines which are broken it is sometimes possible to determine by the voltmeter the distance to the break.

The test which Fenwick had requested was a simple one. When the extremely sensitive voltmeter is connected with a subscriber's line, not only the line but the condenser in the instrument attached to it must be charged, and the amount of current required for this purpose is indicated by the distance which the pointer moves. If an extra instrument has been connected to the line with an accompanying condenser, this condenser will also require charging and will cause the pointer to move a much greater distance.

Pierson pulled down a little key under the voltmeter, and the delicate indicator jumped across the scale.

"What's the diagnosis?" asked Fenwick, entirely dependent on the wire-chief's previous experience in the Riverside central office.

"Two instruments; two condensers," answered Pierson in a monotone. "Funny."

"Damned funny," returned Fenwick.

"I'm going to ask you to cut red tape and do an unusual job in unusual time. Have you any numbers reserved in connection with Riverside 11,980?"

Pierson consulted his records. Consecutive telephone numbers are sometimes reserved to meet the future needs of large telephone users.

"None reserved," he announced, "but line 11,982 is non-working and could be assigned."

"Good enough. I want you to temporarily disconnect Riverside 11,980 and to hook 11,982 up to Warren Willmer's board. Fix it up with the traffic assignment bureau by telephone; don't wait for covering orders. Chase your men out on the job right away, and work them overtime if necessary. I want that line O.K.'d by evening."

"Very well. My orders are to give you anything you wish," responded Pierson.

Fenwick picked up Pierson's head receiver, called the operator, and asked to be connected with Riverside 11,980. In a few moments Lorraine answered.

"This is Bell, Miss Carewe. A telephone man, or perhaps two of them, will be up there in a little while to do some work at the switch-

board. Tell Riggs to ask to see their badges and to permit them to go to work. You may also tell Mr. Willmer that when the telephone men finish he will be immune from calls from the voices."

"Oh, that's splendid, Mr. Bell!" she enthused. "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely," he answered, with conviction. "I'll explain when I see you. Is Mr. King there?"

"No; he's at Forest Hills. He telephoned me a short time ago and said he intended to remain at his home until some of the excitement had died down. He described Mr. Boyden's thrilling experiences, but I'm waiting to hear them all over again from Seth when he returns to the house."

"Seth will be glad to accommodate you, I'm sure," advised Fenwick. "We shall probably be there before the telephone men leave. Good-by."

He discarded the receiver and turned to Pierson.

"I rely on you to take care of that work for me, Pierson," he said.

Pierson nodded.

"Come along, Seth," invited Fenwick, and



the two left the central office building and turned toward Broadway.

"Excellent progress," commented Charlie as the two trudged along. "We've definitely established the fact that some one is using Willmer's wire. Every time we've been present and a questionable call has terminated at his home the line involved has been 11,980. If we temporarily disconnect that line we'll deprive the voices of it as a means of communication. If they insist upon continuing their annoying program they'll have to use another line, and we'll have a better chance of catching them."

"Aren't you going to try to find that instrument on 11,980?" demanded Seth.

"Not to-night," advised Charlie. "It's getting dark, now. That will be your job for to-morrow. You'll have to be diplomatic about it, though. Learn the number of Willmer's cable and conductor and find out if it's been multiplied in other cable-boxes in adjoining residences or apartment-houses. In some basement or cellar of a neighboring building Willmer's wire has been tapped."

"I'll find it, too," promised Seth.

"Let's stop in here," suggested Fenwick,

entering a cigar-store and leading the way to a coin-box telephone-booth. He called Boulevard 5381, depositing the coins requested by the operator. Otis King answered the call.

"This is Cartier," announced Fenwick, speaking in a low tone and giving a fairly credible imitation of that worthy's voice. "Have you told anything?"

"I have n't yet," answered King. "I must see you as soon as possible, though. Anywhere you say. I give you my word of honor you 'll be perfectly safe."

"I 'll call you later and let you know," said Charlie.

"You told Boyden you put one over on me," accused King.

"Only to protect you," reminded Fenwick.

"That 's so. I don't like the looks of things, though. Call me up when you 're at liberty, and I 'll meet you wherever you say."

"I 'll do that," assured Charlie. "Good-by."

He stopped at the counter to fill his cigar-case, permitted Boyden to help himself to a perfecto, and suggested that they walk to the Willmer residence.

"We need the fresh air, Seth," he observed,

“and we seem to be ahead of our schedule. I promised to complete this case in forty-eight hours, and the first twenty-four will not expire until eleven o’clock to-night. We already know one of the voices, and we know how they operate. We also know that at least one of our clients can’t be trusted, for King thought he was actually talking to Cartier a moment ago.”

“What did he say, Charlie?”

“He said he wanted to meet me as soon as possible, and assured me that I would be perfectly safe.”

Boyden whistled.

“Guess that leaves Mr. King out of our future conferences, hey?”

“Guess it does, Seth.”

“We know one o’ the voices, and we know how they operate,” mused Seth, repeating Fenwick’s words. “To-morrow I’m gonna find out where. What’re you gonna do to-morrow?”

“That’s a fair enough question, Seth. Some time to-morrow I’m going to find out why.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### A HUNDRED VOICES

**I**T was past six o'clock when Fenwick and Boyden reached the Willmer home after a leisurely walk, and upon their arrival they found two telephone men engaged in packing up their tools, while a third was engaged in obtaining a test of the newly installed line. When a new trunk is tested the wire-chief connects it with a circuit which makes it theoretically twenty miles long, and thus a very efficient test is made before an O.K. is given to the installer.

Fenwick waited until Pierson advised that the line was functioning properly.

"You fellows did a great rush job," he commended, as the installer left the switchboard.

"Cinch," grinned the man, pleased at the compliment. "Never saw a job run more smoothly. The first cable-conductor we picked up was the one we wanted. Come along, fellows."



The three men picked up their kits and departed. Fenwick turned to Seth.

"There 's efficiency for you," he said. "One nod from Pierson is as good as another man's bond. These quiet chaps are usually like that. Pierson realized that two men might have trouble in making the installation quickly, so he sent three, on his own initiative."

"If you please, sir," announced Riggs, appearing in the doorway, "Miss Carewe wished to be advised when you came in. She 's in the library with Mr. Willmer. And Mr. Corson's just come, sir, and is asking for you."

"We 'll go to the library, Riggs, and take Inspector Corson with us."

Lorraine was talking to her guardian when they entered, and Willmer was apparently interested.

"At last," she murmured. "I had quite given you up, and we 're extremely anxious to hear Mr. Boyden's story. Otis told me part of it briefly, and I 've been trying to tell Mr. Willmer."

"Inspector Corson will be interested, too," observed Fenwick, "so we 'll let Seth start at the beginning and tell the whole story."

"Go ahead, Boyden," grunted Willmer, who once more appeared to have recovered his poise and self-control. "I'd listen to *you* any time. You're the nearest thing to a male human being I've encountered in some time. Can't you begin with some sort of scriptural reference?"

"Galatians, first chapter, thirteenth verse," announced Seth, without hesitation, while Fenwick and Corson exchanged amused glances at Willmer's testy comment.

"Go on," invited Willmer. "What's the verse say?"

"'Ye have heard my conversation in times past.'"

"So we have, Boyden; so we have. I can stand another sample of it, though. Shoot."

Boyden proceeded, describing his identification of Nick as Cartier, his search for the man, his experiences in the Thirteenth Street house, and his subsequent rescue by Fenwick and King. Fenwick then related his altercation with King.

"I tell you, Bell, he's our man!" exclaimed Corson, after hearing an account of the telephone conversation with King in which Fen-

wick impersonated Cartier. "Why didn't you send him to me when he returned from down town?"

"He refused to join you in the first place, and I felt that as long as he was with one of us he could do no damage."

"Right enough. We know now that he's involved, don't we?"

"I don't believe it," objected Lorraine emphatically.

"Sorry, lady," apologized Corson, "but all the evidence points to that fact."

"We don't know to what extent he's involved, inspector," reminded Fenwick. "Just remember that he apparently doesn't know how to get in touch with Cartier, although he's extremely anxious to do so. He's probably an innocent dupe, just stubborn enough not to realize it."

"Leave King to me," suggested Willmer grimly. "If he knows anything that will shed light on our mystery, I'll guarantee to learn what it is."

"That arrangement is agreeable to me," assented Corson. "I have no doubts regarding Mr. Willmer's ability to handle him."

"Thanks," commented Willmer sarcasti-

cally, at which the inspector flushed. Every effort of Corson's to obtain the financier's favor had been similarly repulsed.

Willmer turned to Fenwick.

"Miss Carewe has given me your assurance that the voices will no longer bother me. Will you kindly explain?"

"Gladly," responded Fenwick. "Late this afternoon Mr. Boyden and I arranged for and witnessed an absolutely scientific test which conclusively demonstrated that the voices have been doing all their telephoning over Riverside 11,980. Somewhere in the neighborhood they have cut in an instrument on your line, equipped with facilities for shutting out the operator and ringing you. If they wished to call your partner they placed the call through the operator in the regular way, and she had no means of determining that the call was not from your home. Incidentally, you would be charged with such calls."

"Did you find the instrument?" demanded Willmer.

"No, but we have rendered it valueless. It was too late to start looking for it to-day, so Seth is going to make a search to-morrow. In the mean time the line has been temporarily



disconnected and line 11,982 has been substituted at your switchboard. The next time our unknown friends attempt to use 11,980 they'll find that their sinister equipment will no longer function."

"That's the best thing you've done since you started," declared Willmer. "It almost justifies the faith Mr. Reeves has in your ability."

The telephone rang. Lorraine answered it.

"It's for you, Mr. Bell," she announced.

Fenwick took the instrument.

"Bell speaking," he announced.

"Hello, Mr. Bell," answered a voice which he instantly recognized as Cartier's. "Will you please put some one on the other trunk to find out who is calling River 11,982?"

"I will," answered Fenwick, turning to Boyden. "Seth, run down to the switchboard and ask the operator to let you know who is calling on this line."

He resumed speech with the calling party.

"I've followed your directions," he advised.

"You do such obvious things, Mr. Bell," bantered Cartier. "Don't you know that the voices are everywhere and know everything?"

Five minutes after the old circuit was disconnected and the new one placed in use we transferred our equipment. Does n't that tell you something about the strength and infallibility of our organization? Go back to your telephone job, Mr. Bell, and leave Willmer to us. Sooner or later he will stop our operations in the only way they can be stopped: by meeting our demands."

"I will tell him, Cartier," promised Fenwick. "In the mean time I would advise you to get in touch with Otis King. He's very anxious to talk with you."

"I will, Bell—but over another telephone. I'm not going to give you a chance to listen in on this wire. Good night."

Disappointed, crestfallen, and unutterably chagrined, Charlie hung up the receiver as Seth hurriedly entered the room.

"The operator claimed no one was callin' on River 11,982," announced Boyden. "Looks as if they've cut in on the new line already!"

"They have, Seth," admitted Fenwick. "They may have been listening in when I called Miss Carewe and told her the installers were coming. See if you can get Pierson on the 'phone."

“Apparently your promises of immunity from further annoyance do not mean much,” grumbled Willmer.

Fenwick flushed.

“I’m beaten, sir, for the present, and will have to admit it. But I’m not discouraged. Every new development, every little setback, is merely bringing us closer to a solution. I am making no vain boast nor am I over-optimistic when I say that by eleven o’clock to-morrow night the voices will be silenced.”

“But how about the mystery of Pendleton Kirke’s death?” demanded Corson.

“The answer to that may be found by any careful, analytical person who will visit the study at Newton.”

The inspector stared at Fenwick, puzzled and incredulous.

“That’s almost a challenge,” he announced slowly. “I’ve never been accused of carelessness, and I’ve always prided myself on having a certain talent for analyzing and reconstructing. To-morrow I shall visit Newton again. If I fail to get the answer I’m going to ask you to give it to me.”

“And I’ll gladly comply, inspector, on one condition: that you do not interfere with my

handling of Mr. Willmer's case until after eleven o'clock to-morrow night."

"Done," agreed Corson, and the two shook hands.

"Here 's Pierson," advised Boyden, handing the telephone instrument to Fenwick.

"Hello, Pierson," began Charlie. "This is Bell. How many men did you send to Mr. Willmer's to hook up that new line?"

"Two," responded Pierson. "When they came back I asked them how they managed to finish so quickly. They told me that when they reached the house a passing telephone man hailed them and volunteered to assist in the work. He was on his way home. They accepted his help, but since it was contrary to instructions I gave them both a bawling out. Anything wrong?"

"Everything," declared Charlie. "Did they get his badge-number?"

"Yes; 478."

"Thank you, Pierson." He replaced the receiver and turned to Boyden.

"What was Cartier's badge-number, Seth, when he worked for the company?"

"Four seventy-eight."

"And to think we never recognized him!



He was one of the three men who worked on the switchboard down-stairs. I recall now that one of the men took lots of time to gather up his tools, and kept his head down while he was doing it. He didn't fear identification; he was merely avoiding it."

"D'you mean to tell me that fellow has been in my home again?" demanded Willmer, his fist descending upon the table with a crash. "This comes of trusting a damned amateur. You're dangerous, sir; absolutely dangerous! These people seek my fortune or my life, and you carelessly provide them with the means of entering my home."

"Not intentionally, sir," put in Fenwick, carefully repressing the anger that was surging up within him. "I sought to save you further annoyance and was outguessed. My motives were entirely honest. You interest me, however, when you say that your fortune or your life is at stake. Will you tell me why?"

Willmer fidgeted at this reminder that he had been reticent regarding the case from the beginning. He refused to meet the challenge in the young wire-chief's eyes.

"Will you tell me why Otis King refuses

to help me? Or perhaps you will tell me why you want the mysterious telephone-calls eliminated but have no interest in catching the offenders?"

Several times Willmer was about to speak, but words appeared to fail him.

"None of your damned business!" he blurted finally, punctuating each word with a smash of the fist upon the table. He arose heavily, his eyelids narrowed, and his lips trembling nervously. "You understand the conditions under which you took this case. If you're not a fraud and a joke you'll accomplish something real *to-night*. If you don't the inspector may begin work on the case to-morrow morning."

He started for the door, but so uncertain were his footsteps that Lorraine hastened to his side and gave him the assistance one would offer the aged or infirm.

"Irascible old gent," chuckled Corson, far from displeased at the turn events had taken. "You can bet that when I take hold I'm not going to pry into his personal affairs. There's just one thing to do, and that is to pretend to capitulate to this gang. It's money they are after, and some one will have to come and get

it or some one will have to take it to them. That's where we're going to get them."

"You haven't taken hold yet," reminded Fenwick.

"No," admitted Corson cheerfully, "you still have to-night."

"Unless you learn more about Pendleton Kirke's death, I have until eleven o'clock to-morrow night," corrected Fenwick.

"We shall see," smiled Corson. "I'm going now, but we shall probably meet to-morrow."

"Probably," agreed Fenwick. "Good night."

As the inspector left the room Charlie turned quickly to Boyden.

"They've sort of put it up to us, Seth," he said. "You've simply got to find that equipment to-morrow, while I must definitely establish the reason for blackmailing Willmer."

Boyden nodded reassuringly, and again the telephone rang. It was a distinctly pleasant masculine voice that spoke when Fenwick answered the summons.

"May I speak with Mr. Willmer?"

"Mr. Willmer is busy," answered Charlie.

"Passing over that obvious falsehood, Mr.

Bell," continued the voice, "I wish to advise you that we have decided to issue an ultimatum. Mr. Willmer may have until midnight to-morrow night to meet our demands. Failure to do so will result in publicity of a particularly undesirable nature in every newspaper in the city. A subsequent refusal to deal with us will mean that Mr. Willmer does not value his life. Do I make myself clear?"

"No," answered Fenwick. "You fail to particularize the demands with which Mr. Willmer must comply."

"They will be stated in full," answered the unknown, "when Mr. Willmer personally indicates a desire to hear them. Until then we have arranged to have our members telephone him at intervals of thirty minutes, to remind him of his obligations."

A distant click told Fenwick that the party had disconnected. Deeply engrossed in thought, he sat with the telephone instrument before him, drumming on the desk with his finger-tips.

"That voice was certainly familiar, Seth, but I can't seem to place it. It was n't Cartier, but I'm sure it was the chap who imper-



sonated Willmer when Cartier, or Nick, escaped. It was the same voice that telephoned to the Ibis Club pretending to be Willmer."

"That's enough for me, Charlie," assured Seth. "I never knew you to go wrong on voices yet. Anything I kin do?"

"Yes, Seth. You seem to have made quite a hit with Willmer. Go to him and reassure him. Get him in a good humor, insist that there's nothing to worry about, and prevail upon him to retire early. Do the same with Miss Carewe. She will probably insist upon staying up and helping us, but I rely on you to convince her that she should be in her room early and should stay there until morning.

"As soon as you've done that, come down to the switchboard. I'm going down there now. The fellow who just called up told me that we may expect a call from one of the voices every thirty minutes until Willmer accedes to their demands. It will give us a fine chance to study them, but we'll have to take separate tricks at the switchboard, and I want every one out of the way."

Boyden departed to carry out his orders and Fenwick hurried to the lower floor, where he advised Riggs and the housekeeper to re-

tire early. He also instructed them to issue orders to the other servants.

No particular member of the Willmer household had ever been charged with the responsibility of acting as private branch exchange operator. The nearest one to the switchboard usually performed the necessary operations whenever an annunciator shutter dropped and the buzzer sounded. More than an inkling of the mysterious messages had penetrated to the servant's quarters, however, and the housekeeper actually sighed with relief as she saw Fenwick take his place at the switchboard.

Fenwick waited at least twenty minutes before receiving a call. It appeared on trunk 11,982, and as he plugged in and announced, "This is the Willmer residence," the calling party answered promptly. It was the voice of an old woman, unmistakably Irish.

"I 'll give me number first," she announced. "'Tis Voice Number One, and I 'm afther tellin' yez that many 's the sin Warren Willmer has on his head and hands. Tell him 't will not be well with him till he does as the voices ask. Good-by to yez."

Fenwick listened intently to the voice, and

smiled faintly with satisfaction as the conversation terminated without a request to speak with Willmer developing.

Riggs entered the room.

"Mr. Willmer is dining in his den, sir, with Mr. Boyden. I just served them. Miss Carewe said she would wait until Mr. Boyden could relieve you at the switchboard, sir, and would then dine with you."

"How does Mr. Willmer act, Riggs?"

"Fine, sir," answered Riggs, with just a touch of loyal enthusiasm. "Mr. Boyden's telling him stories, and they're both laughing most of the time."

"Good enough," grinned Fenwick, and he again faced the switchboard as Riggs withdrew.

At 7:30 the second call developed. The gentleman calling possessed a marked Teutonic accent.

"Dis iss Voice Number Two. Herr Villmer iss in great danger unless he does vat ve dell him. Blease say to him that vat ve ask for to him does not belong."

As this conversation terminated Boyden appeared.

"This is as good as a vaudeville perform-

ance, Seth," Fenwick told him. "I've had two calls. One was supposed to be an Irish woman and the other was a fellow with a German accent. Both threatened Willmer. As a matter of fact, I'm absolutely sure that only one person is calling—the same fellow who warned me that we might expect messages every thirty minutes. I'm sure of it, and just as sure that I've heard his voice before. Sooner or later the name of its owner will occur to me. How is Willmer?"

"Gone to bed," advised Seth. "I had him feelin' pretty good. First off, he was grouchy an' broodin' over his troubles, specially these telephone-calls, but I told him some o' the funny things that happen to telephone men, and purty soon I had him laughin'. Miss Carewe is waitin' for you in the dinin'-room, so ye'd better hurry."

"I will, Seth. When the next call comes in, listen carefully and see if you can recognize the voice."

Fenwick joined Lorraine in the dining-room.

"Any progress?" she asked as Riggs proceeded to serve them.

"Some," he acknowledged. "I feel sure



that we have no gang to contend with, for one thing. There are just two people causing all this trouble. One of them is Cartier, and the other is Cartier's boss."

She was apparently puzzled.

"Why, there must be others involved, Mr. Bell," she protested. "So many people have called up. I should say that there have been approximately a hundred different voices."

"It may have seemed so," admitted Fenwick, "but I rarely make a mistake where voices are concerned, and I'm confident that one man has been doing almost all the telephoning. He's a wonderful mimic and has genuine histrionic talents. For want of a better name or until we establish his identity, let's call him the Man with a Hundred Voices."

She shuddered.

"And I'll have to acknowledge that I made a serious error," he continued. "Do you recall that early this morning I ventured to describe the unknown person who telephoned?"

She nodded.

"You said, 'He's young, dark-complexioned, dirty, illiterate,' and a lot of other things," she quoted.

"Well, I was wrong," admitted Fenwick. "So well did the Man with a Hundred Voices play his part that I mistook the mimic for the real, and I described the very type he sought to counterfeit."

"It sounds weird and mysterious, does n't it? Nevertheless, it is comforting to know that we have only two people to fear instead of a host of unknown foes. But how about Cartier?"

"Cartier undoubtedly has telephoned occasionally, as one of the voices, but his companion is the man the newspapers would call the master mind."

"You should be a detective," she smiled, "instead of a telephone man. You seem to have positive talent in that direction."

"Thank you. I'm afraid I'd be an utter failure. The telephone business is exciting and romantic enough for me."

"But think of going through life looking for the Man with a Hundred Voices! Does n't it sound alluring?"

"Not at all. It sounds discouraging. I've contracted to find him before eleven o'clock to-morrow night."

## CHAPTER XV.

### TRINITY CHIMES

“**M**R. BOYDEN tells me that I cannot be of assistance this evening,” said Lorraine Carewe, as they left the table. “I do wish you good luck, however, and I truly hope that you ’ll do something to regain Mr. Willmer’s confidence before morning. If you knew him as well as I do you ’d appreciate the fact that his present state of mind presages a more violent outburst. He was particularly mean and inconsiderate to you this evening, and I felt awfully sorry for you. I would n’t blame you a bit if you entirely discontinued your efforts in his behalf.”

“I ’m not making any efforts in his behalf,” reminded Fenwick. “I ’m merely doing a job assigned to me by my superior. So far as I ’m concerned Mr. Willmer is entirely out of the picture.”

“Then you merely regard this as a disagreeable task to be disposed of as quickly as pos-

sible?" she asked. "Sentiment and pride do not enter into it at all?"

"On the contrary, I 'm tremendously interested, because the task is agreeable. I do take pride in what I 'm doing, aside from striving to find favor in the eyes of my boss. As for sentiment, I shall feel amply repaid if I succeed in driving the troubled look from the eyes of a beautiful damsel who personifies the Moslem's idea of beauty, but who objects to being reminded of the fact."

As a delicate blush suffused the fine texture of her skin and caused the dark lashes to mask the glory of her darker eyes, Fenwick's face held a whimsical smile. Again he had shaken off his diffidence, and had launched his sally in precisely the tone of banter that would give evidence of underlying sincerity.

"Gallant as ever, Mr. Bell," she observed, when she had sufficiently regained her composure to meet his eyes. "I 'm flattered at your efforts in my behalf. Now I 'm going to write a letter or two, after which I shall take Mr. Boyden's advice. 'Early to bed, miss!' said Seth, wagging an imperative forefinger. Please tell him that I 'm following his admonition to the letter."



"I will," he assured her, and they parted. He immediately rejoined Boyden at the switchboard.

"Anything doing, Seth?" he asked.

"Nary a nibble," answered his assistant disgustedly. "Hello, here 's a bite, now!"

"Just eight o'clock," reminded Fenwick. "Take the call."

Boyden plugged in and flicked the listening key.

"Mr. Willmer's residence," he announced, and then listened intently for a minute or two.

"I 'll remember," he informed the calling party. "The clock will strike twelve three times before that happens. Mebbe it won't even happen." He disconnected and turned to Fenwick.

"Frenchman," he advised. "Said that after midnight to-morrow Willmer's reputation would be utterly destroyed. Purty tough ain't it, Charlie?"

"It may be considerably worse than we think," returned Fenwick, so seriously that Seth's facetious manner vanished instantly.

"What are you goin' to do if Willmer orders you off the case?"

"We 're going to continue," answered Fen-

wick promptly. "He can't interfere with your efforts to locate the missing station in this vicinity, nor can he obstruct my efforts to learn the reason for these attempts at blackmail, so long as my investigations are carried on outside his home."

At Boyden's request Charlie outlined the procedure he wished Seth to follow in searching for the piratical telephone equipment. The discussion continued until the switchboard clock indicated the time as twenty-five minutes past eight. Fenwick exchanged places with Boyden.

"We should have another call within the next five minutes," explained Fenwick. "I've been racking my memory in an endeavor to recall the owner of that voice. Perhaps it will come to me if I hear it again. Sooner or later I'm going to remember it."

"There's your call now!" said Seth.

"I hardly think so," disagreed Fenwick. "This call is on 11,981. We know that the voices are using 11,982, the new trunk." He hurriedly plugged in and answered.

"Please refrain from speaking except on request," ordered a clear, brusque voice. "Are you listening, Inspector Corson?"

"Yes," answered a somewhat faint, distant voice.

"You are at Newton, inspector?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Don't ask questions. Are *you* listening, Mr. Otis King?"

"I 'm listening," responded King.

"Do you hear me distinctly at Forest Hills?"

"Fairly well."

"And Mr. Willmer. Are *you* listening, Mr. Willmer?"

"This is Mr. Willmer's residence, but Mr. Willmer is not listening," responded Fenwick.

"Ah, the estimable Mr. Bell. I should have preferred Mr. Willmer, but his chicken heart has apparently failed him. We 'll have to get along with Mr. Bell for the present. We are assembled to discuss a matter of tremendous importance.

"After twelve o'clock to-morrow night the newspapers of this city will be supplied with copy of a sensational nature regarding the triumvirate. The publication of this information will mark the point at which disintegra-

tion of that vast financial power will begin. To prevent such a catastrophe, money will be required; a large sum. The money must be furnished by Warren Willmer. Mr. King, may I rely on you to use your influence to this end?"

"As I've said before," responded King, "I'll see you in hell first!"

"You are young and foolish, Mr. King," continued the voice. "I don't despair of changing your mind before to-morrow night. How about you, Mr. Corson? Would you care to advise this heedless youth?"

"Gladly," answered Corson. "I'll undertake to convince Mr. Willmer as well. I'll tell them both that the course you prescribe is the only safe and sane one."

"Good for you, inspector. I hope you mean it. No tricks or traps, remember. If you are hoping to accomplish the downfall of my organization, you'd better abandon the notion immediately. We expect fair dealing. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly," agreed the inspector.

"May we expect your assistance, Mr. Bell?" continued the voice.



"You may not," retorted Charlie. "I shall strongly advise against anything of the kind. Before midnight to-morrow you will have reason to regret every threat you have made."

"You are an excellent telephone man, Mr. Bell," returned the unknown in even tones, "but you are scarcely qualified to act as adviser to a multimillionaire in an affair of this character. As a sign and warning to all of you I have arranged to demonstrate to-night that Warren Willmer is entirely within the power of the voices. I hope you will profit by the warning. Are there any questions?"

"Just one," put in Corson. "If Mr. Willmer agrees to meet your demands, how are we to let you know?"

"A fair question, inspector. I'll call Mr. Willmer at noon to-morrow. He must answer the telephone himself and will then be advised of all the details. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," assented the inspector.

"Any other questions?" asked the voice.

"Yes," answered Fenwick. "You've explained things pretty clearly and know the attitude of each of us. Earlier this evening you advised that this house would be called by a different member of your gang every

thirty minutes. There is no necessity for continuing that farce. Will you entertain a suggestion to discontinue the calls for the rest of the night?"

The man chuckled.

"Hardly," he refused. "I want you to have a definite idea of the number and variety of the persons with whom you are dealing. I want you to note the precision and regularity with which we operate. The calls will be continued! Is that all?"

No one answered.

"Good night!" mocked the voice and disconnected. Fenwick immediately slipped from his chair and, turning to Seth, briefly acquainted him with the nature of the conversation.

"Get my coat and hat, Seth," he ordered. "I'm going to find the person who called."

"How?" queried Seth. "If he was talkin' from a private branch exchange you should've let me get on the wire and find out the number from the operator."

"You could n't," explained Charlie. "You did n't notice it, but a call came through on 11,982 directly after the one on the other

trunk. It was the same fellow calling. He put the other line in use for just that reason. Hurry—my coat and hat.”

Seth bustled out of sight, but soon returned.

“Call the Long Island toll-board chief operator, right away,” advised Fenwick. “Ask her to make a search through the tickets written within the last thirty minutes. We want to learn what Rector number called Boulevard 5381 and Newton 4987. Stick to the switchboard and take every call that comes in. Be on your guard; they’ve threatened to demonstrate their power to harm Mr. Willmer. Good-by.”

“How do you know it was a Rector number?” queried Boyden, following Fenwick to the front door.

“Tell you when I return; no time now.”

Fenwick flew down the stairs and was fortunate to obtain a taxicab immediately.

“Where to?” asked the chauffeur.

“One eleven Broadway, and snap it up,” he ordered.

The chauffeur obeyed his injunction to the letter, and the tires fairly sang on the trip down town. Fenwick was not over-sanguine

regarding the success of his trip, but he felt that it was a fair gamble, and that Boyden would successfully cope with any developments at the Willmer residence while he was away.

The brakes suddenly protested, the driver shifted his gears, and the taxi came to a halt.

"Here you are, sir," announced the chauffeur, opening the door.

"Wait for me," requested Fenwick. He looked about. Half-way up the next block two policemen were peering into a store window. He hurried to the spot. Gilt lettering on the window read: "Branson's Ticket Agency."

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"We 're wonderin'," answered one of the officers. "This place is usually closed after seven in the evenin'. George here spotted a stranger usin' the telephones in there a while ago. This place is run by two women, and we never saw a man behind the counter before. There 's the feller gettin' into that taxi at the next corner."

Fenwick glanced in the direction indicated. A slender chap wearing a light raincoat and cap stepped hurriedly into the waiting cab,



which immediately spun around on its small wheel-base and headed up-town.

"No burglar-alarm?" queried Fenwick.

"No. The place is open to the street, with a cop passing almost constantly. This feller had a key. I called Pat here, becuz I was n't sure what to do."

"You should have grabbed him," observed Fenwick. "I 'm going to try to catch him."

He returned to his taxi and pointed out the distant tail-light on the stranger's cab.

"Catch that fellow," he ordered.

Without a word his driver started off and made the most of the fact that there was no traffic to interfere with his progress. Passing City Hall Park he turned to Fenwick.

"If we can steal up on him we can catch him," he said. "If he spots us and tries to get away we 're done for. That cab 's a six-cylinder; mine 's a four."

He turned to his wheel, and, utterly disregarding speed-laws, ran his speedometer up to a point that caused the somewhat ancient vehicle to vibrate, creak, and knock amazingly. As they reached Canal Street their quarry was less than two blocks distant, but they were compelled to wait by traffic.

"We 've got to get 'em soon," explained the driver. "I need gas and oil both. Besides, I think that fellow noticed me. He speeded up a lot just about here."

As they moved on the rear light of the stranger's cab was again a mere speck in the distance, and it was more than evident that the pursuit had been observed. Fenwick's driver made a despairing final effort, but soon abandoned it.

"No use," he announced. "She 's smokin' now." He turned down a side street to a service-station, where he procured the necessary gas, oil, and water.

"Will you want me any more?" he asked, genuinely disappointed at his inability to meet the requirements of his fare. Fenwick gave him the Willmer address. As if to prove his ability to drive expertly, he overhauled and passed other cars on Broadway with surprising regularity. Once on the Drive, it was merely a matter of minutes before he stopped at the Willmer mansion.

Fenwick paid him, adding a generous tip. "You did your best," he commended.

"Honest, boss, you make me feel like hell!" answered the chauffeur, gazing at the gratuity

uncertainly. He touched his cap gratefully as Fenwick ascended the steps.

Boyden admitted him.

"Let's hurry back to the board," he suggested. "I got a call at nine o'clock, but there wa'n't any at nine thirty, and it's quarter o' ten now."

"I doubt if you get any more," yawned Charlie, thumbing the pages of a New York City directory. He ran down a page until he encountered the listing of "Brason's Ticket Agency." "Did the toll-board operator tell you those calls to Newton and Forest Hills were from Rector 23,960?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Boyden, bewildered. "How did you know?"

"I've just been down to the premises at which that telephone is located. Theater ticket agency. A veritable room full of telephones, including a P.B.X. That fellow could n't have picked out a better place to get us all on the wire and to throw keys and switches so we could all listen in."

"How'd you know where to go?" demanded Seth.

"Trinity chimes. Heard them ring while that fellow was talking to me over the tele-

phone. Knew that he must be somewhere close by."

"Did ye catch him?"

"No, but I saw him. It was n't Cartier."

"Who was it?"

"I was n't near enough to see him very well; in fact, the momentary glimpse I had occurred at a time when he was entering a taxicab. From the clothes he wore, he might easily have been mistaken for Otis King."

"But King was on the wire, talkin' f'm Forest Hills!" protested Seth.

"Exactly, Seth. In other words, we're stopped right there."

Riggs rushed into the room, trousers hastily pulled on over his pajamas, his manner extremely agitated.

"Mr. Willmer—er—Mr. Willmer, sir—"

"What about him, Riggs?"

"He's dead or dying, sir. Please come quickly."

All three rushed from the room and up the stairs. They followed Riggs into his master's bedchamber. Riggs switched on all the lights. Willmer was perfectly motionless, a more peaceful expression on his face than Boyden or Fenwick had ever witnessed. Fenwick



hurried to his side. He felt of Willmer's hands, then threw back the covers and placed his ear to the financier's chest.

"Sleeping soundly, Riggs," he advised. "Don't worry. Why—what's this?"

The exclamation was caused by the discovery of a scrap of newspaper pinned to the financier's pillow. On the margin of it was typed:

Drugged. We could have poisoned him or shot him. We are all-powerful.

THE VOICES.

He passed it to Boyden, and Riggs peered over Seth's shoulder to read it. The butler's knees sagged and his face paled as he grasped the significance of the note.

"My God!" he muttered hoarsely. "Can't you do anything, sir?"

"I'm afraid I can't to-night, Riggs," he confessed, slowly and soberly. "How did you discover this?"

"I retired early, sir, as Mr. Boyden directed, but I could n't get to sleep. I had a feeling that something was wrong. It seemed like hours that I lay there, and finally I could n't stand it any longer. I slipped on some of my

clothes and came in here. Mr. Willmer has n't slept soundly in some time, but repeated knocks on his door went unanswered, so I used my own key. The minute I saw him I suspected foul play. I called to him, but he didn't answer. Then I rushed down to you."

Fenwick picked up the small glass that stood beside a decanter on the telephone-table near Willmer's bed. A quantity of liquor remained in the glass. He smelled it and tasted it gingerly.

"Laudanum," he advised. "The whole bottle has probably been drugged. Put it in a safe place, Riggs."

"Has anything happened?" asked an anxious voice, and Lorraine Carewe glided silently into the room. She was a vision of loveliness in her satin, crape, and lace dressing-gown of flesh and lavender—colors which contrasted strikingly with her wealth of flowing coal-black hair. Some distance from the bed she halted, arrested by the serious expressions of the three men.

"What is wrong?" she begged, looking from one to the other, the tears welling up in her

eyes. Slowly, reluctantly, she approached the bed.

Fenwick touched her on the shoulder.

"Mr. Willmer is in no danger, Miss Carewe," he assured her. "Our concern is due to what might have happened. He has merely been drugged and is in a deep sleep."

"Drugged? Who—when—I don't understand!" she protested.

He led her to a chair and persuaded her to be seated. Then he repeated Rigg's story, and showed her the note which had been pinned to Willmer's pillow.

She grew pale as she read it, although making an obvious effort to control herself.

"This is the limit of my endurance, Mr. Bell," she announced slowly. "I've been just as brave as I could be, but one simply can't become inured to occurrences of this kind. I can't answer for Mr. Willmer, but he must be told just what has occurred and be permitted to make his own decision."

"You're absolutely right," answered Fenwick gravely. "I'd hesitate to influence any action he might care to take after this. The inspector will be here in the morning, and we'll go over the whole story. There's no

immediate cause for alarm, however, and you'd better return to your room. Riggs and I will stay right here until morning."

She handed him the scrap of newspaper, but hesitated before reaching the door.

"I'm frightened," she confessed plaintively. "I'm for ever seeing shadows and hearing noises."

"Seth will escort you to your room," suggested Fenwick. "Riggs had better rouse your maid; you'll feel safer if you have company."

"Thank you, Mr. Bell," she murmured gratefully. "You are as sympathetic and understanding as a woman. Good night."

She took Seth's arm and permitted him to lead her from the room.

"A wonderful young lady, sir," observed Riggs, his eyes glued admiringly to the doorway through which she had just departed.

"Wonderful, Riggs," repeated Fenwick.

"She seems to have a high regard for you, sir, if I may say so."

"Does she, Riggs?" mused Fenwick, as if turning the statement over in his mind. "I wonder if it can be possible that you are right?"



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE BARGAIN

**D**ESPITE his all-night vigil in the financier's bedchamber, Fenwick, began preparations for a busy day early the next morning. He left Riggs with Willmer, instructing him to say nothing regarding the drugging episode until a conference was held later in the morning. Then he breakfasted with Seth, discussing the possibility of locating the station used by the voices and again instructing him in the method to be followed.

"I'd feel more optimistic if it was open wire, Charlie," admitted Boyden, referring to the manner in which wires are strung overhead in suburban communities. In New York City virtually all wires used for the telephone, telegraph, burglar-alarms, and fire-alarms are underground, and Seth had only a limited knowledge of the general scheme of conduits, cables, cable-boxes, and multiple conductors.

"There's nothing to it, Seth," encouraged

Fenwick. "Just follow my directions and you'll run across the equipment somewhere."

Boyden telephoned Pierson and obtained some necessary information. He had donned working-clothes and had provided himself with an installer's badge and a kit of tools.

"Well, so-long, Charlie," he grinned.

"Good luck, Seth. You're all prepared, I see."

"As it says in the ninth chapter o' Revelations, fifteenth verse, 'Prepared for an hour and a day and a month and a year.' "

"Let us hope it will be an hour, Seth."

"Can't tell. You've given me a double assignment. The thirty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, eighteenth verse, asks, 'Where is the receiver?' Charlie Fenwick is askin', 'Where is the transmitter and the receiver?' "

"You'll find one where you find the other, Seth."

"Guess you're right, Charlie. So-long."

As soon as his assistant left he telephoned Newton and was advised by a servant that Corson was on his way to New York and would call on Willmer at ten o'clock. As he was about to leave the switchboard, Marie—Lorraine's maid—entered the little room.

"Mademoiselle ees not well zis morning," she announced. "M'sieur Willmaire ees not well, too, and Riggs 'ave told me to telephone for ze doctaire."

He waited until she had finished the call.

"What seems to be the trouble, Marie?" he asked.

"M'sieur Willmaire has a spleeting headache," she answered.

"And Miss Carewe, Marie?"

"Ah! You would know zat, too. Eet ees nairves, I t'eenk. Shall I say to mademoiselle zat you eenquire?" She flashed him a teasing smile.

"If you will be so kind."

"She will be glad, M'sieur Bell."

The vivacious Marie flitted from the room with a knowing smile, and Fenwick idled about the lower floor until Riggs came down.

"How is Mr. Willmer, Riggs?"

"He has a terrible headache, sir, and I think he suspects that something is wrong. He has a strong aversion to doctors, except for other people, but when I suggested calling on Dr. Robbins he protested very weakly, and finally consented. Of course he may have been influenced by Miss Carewe's condition, since he

insisted that the doctor see her first. If I'm not mistaken here he is now."

He admitted the physician, a man of about forty, with a seriously professional demeanor, Riggs showed him up-stairs, at the same time explaining that Willmer had probably been drugged, and requesting that the fact be withheld from him for an hour or two. Dr. Robbins immediately grew suspicious and questioned Riggs closely, but the fact that Inspector Corson was expected at the house seemed to satisfy him.

About twenty minutes later the physician left, and Riggs informed Fenwick that he had administered a sedative to Miss Carewe and had advised her to remain in bed. He had also prescribed for Willmer, and had somewhat enraged the financier by recommending a stay of several weeks at a sanatorium.

"Mr. Willmer wished to know if you were still here, and if Inspector Corson was expected. I told him that you wished to hold a conference when the inspector arrives at ten o'clock. He just nodded and said he would see you both in the library. He also said he did n't want Miss Carewe disturbed."

Corson arrived promptly, and the three men



met in the room designated by Willmer. Corson began by describing the four-cornered conversation of the previous evening, including the threat of the voices to demonstrate their ability to harm the financier. At this point Fenwick took up the story, and told of his trip down town, his identification of the office within the shadow of Trinity from which the call had originated, and his pursuit of the man who had telephoned. He told of his chagrin at having the man elude him, and of his return to the house. Then he described the agitated appearance of Riggs as he called for assistance, the rush to Willmer's room, and the discovery of the note typed on a scrap of newspaper. He took the note from his wallet and handed it to Willmer.

The financier read it and was silent for a long time. Then he passed the note to Corson.

"You have n't seen it, I believe," he muttered in hollow tones.

Corson examined it closely, but apparently regarded it of slight importance.

"There's just one thing to do, sir, and that is to pretend to submit to the demands of this gang. That fellow who asked me to use my

influence said that he would telephone you at noon to-day, and stipulated that you answer the telephone. My advice is for you to do so. Learn how much it is the blackmailers demand, obtain the money in any form they suggest, and find out where they want it delivered. I'll have a squad of men in the neighborhood, where ever it is, and we'll gather them in."

The inspector sounded convincing, and Willmer nodded eager assent, like a drowning man clutching a straw.

"No doubt you're right, Corson," he agreed. "What do you think, Bell? Shall I do it?"

"It can't do any harm to try it, sir," he answered, rather surprised at the question, in view of Willmer's denunciation of his efforts on the previous evening.

"Don't think me ungrateful, Bell," he begged. "I appreciate all you have done. It was splendid of you to labor so strenuously in my behalf last night, after I had given way to my overwrought nerves. Now it's a question of self-preservation. I must act, and act quickly. You will not mind if I follow the inspector's advice?"

"Not at all," responded Fenwick.

"I should like you to remain here, so that you may confer and advise with the inspector, giving him such assistance as he may request. Will you do that?"

Fenwick hesitated.

"If the inspector wishes it," he assented.

"Glad to have your help, Charlie," acknowledged Corson magnanimously. He tried to restrain a triumphant smile, but fell short of concealing it.

"Professional jealousy, eh?" queried Willmer, forcing a feeble smile. "Let's work together. I'm going to lie down and try to get rid of the effects of that damned drug. My mouth feels like a dusty desert. Any instruction, Corson?"

"I'm going to ask Fenwick to take the switchboard, sir. When that telephone-call comes in at noon he will connect you with the fellow and let you do the bargaining. Fenwick will listen in, and we'll be sure to get everything perfectly straight."

Willmer nodded assent and went to his room.

"I believe we're going to get somewhere," exulted Corson.

"Don't be too optimistic," cautioned Fenwick.

"I can't help it; it's a hunch. The fellow who receives Willmer's money is going to have bracelets slipped on his wrists, surer than fate. Oh, by the way, Charlie, I'd like you to examine all the telephone instruments in the house. Seems to me I once heard of a case where a man was shot by a cartridge placed inside a telephone receiver. The fellow who put the cartridge there called this chap up and yelled into the telephone until something or other got hot. That set off the cartridge, and the chap with the receiver to his ear was shot through the brain!" He walked up and down the room, smiling gleefully and darting quick, knowing glances at Fenwick.

"Stick to your own line, inspector," advised Charlie good-naturedly. "The case you heard of was in a story-book. If you like I'll examine the receiver in Willmer's room. I imagine from your manner that you believe you have stumbled on the explanation to Pendleton Kirke's death. You have n't, I assure you. When I entered Kirke's study, his telephone receiver was on the hook."



"Sure you did n't put it there?" demanded Corson, his smile disappearing.

"Absolutely. You'll have to get another theory."

Disconcerted by Fenwick's refusal to consider what he regarded as a positive answer to the mystery of Pendleton Kirke's death, Corson paced the floor for half an hour, reviewing the entire tragedy from all angles and cross-examining Fenwick in an endeavor to obtain further facts. He was unable to evolve a plausible theory to supplant the ones previously rejected by Fenwick, and gave the thing up in utter disgust and impatience.

"You'll have to tell me, anyway, as soon as I round up the voices," he reminded.

"I will, inspector—when you round up the voices!"

It was nearing noon, and Fenwick went to the switchboard on the lower floor. While awaiting the significant message he telephoned Diamond Jim Ordway and made an appointment to visit that eccentric but intensely human individual at his office at two o'clock in the afternoon. At ten minutes of twelve Corson joined them.

"A penny for your thoughts, Charlie," he offered, observing the young wire-chief's pre-occupied manner.

"I was just thinking of that four-cornered conversation last night, and trying to visualize the miles of hard-drawn copper wire and tons of equipment it called into use. A year or two from now it will be a comparatively simple matter for a person to talk to thousands without any apparatus to speak of."

"What do you mean?"

"Radio; wireless telephony. Colonel Carty and some of his engineers believe it will be possible for the entire nation to hear the inaugural address of our next President. Think of it, man! Our War Department, if we have one, will be able to instantly mobilize an army of defense all over the country by means of a spoken word or two."

"Marvelous!" agreed Corson. "But won't we have many more cases like the voices when that time arrives? And won't it put a certain phonic criminologist out of business?"

"The answer to both questions is 'No,' inspector. Radio in its present development does not afford the privacy required by criminals. As for my work, I don't specialize in

the telephone business; my specialty is the spoken word, regardless of the medium used to broadcast it."

"There's the call!" exclaimed Corson eagerly, crowding close to the switchboard.

Fenwick picked it up, announcing, "Mr. Willmer's residence." At the calling party's request to talk with Willmer he established a connection with the financier's room and rang the bell.

Willmer answered promptly.

"You have decided to follow Inspector Corson's advice?" queried the brusque, clear voice of the preceding evening.

"Yes," acknowledged Willmer.

"It will cost you one hundred thousand dollars, Mr. Willmer. Upon payment of that sum the voices will permanently cease to bother you."

"When do you wish this money?" inquired Willmer.

"At one o'clock. In cash—one hundred bills of a thousand denomination. I will send an intermediary to your home for it in an hour."

"Any credentials?" asked Willmer.

“None,” returned the voice. “He will merely ask for the money.”

“What assurance have I that the voices will cease to annoy me?”

“Nothing but the word of an unknown man. You will have to trust us as we are trusting you. Your friends and associates will regret it exceedingly if you attempt to double-cross us. *You* will be past regretting anything. The money must be ready for my man when he calls at one o’clock.”

“It will be ready,” assured Willmer; and the unknown hung up his receiver.

Fenwick repeated the conversation for Corson’s benefit.

“One hundred thousand!” exclaimed Corson. “I wonder what deviltry the old boy’s been up to, that he should be called upon to pay such a price! Call headquarters for me, will you, Charlie?”

Fenwick complied with his request, and in a few moments Corson was arranging to have a dozen plain-clothes men keep the Willmer home under surveillance. He issued orders that they were to take no action toward persons entering the house, but were to appre-



hend any who might leave unless he vouched for them.

As the call terminated Willmer entered the room.

"Did you hear?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Corson. "Fenwick listened in and has told me what was said. Have you so huge a sum on deposit in one bank?"

"Surely. Will it be necessary to actually withdraw it? I could arrange to have the bank say I did, if—"

"Too thin," interrupted Corson. "We will have to go through all the motions. Write your check and send some one to have it cashed immediately. The whole thing must look like a legitimate transaction up to the point where we make an arrest."

"I'll send Riggs," decided Willmer, and went to his room to write the check.

"How are you going to proceed?" inquired Fenwick. "Have you any plans?"

"Don't need any elaborate plans," answered Corson. "When this bird shows up at one o'clock we'll look him over. If he's some one we've suspected we'll nab him. If he seems to be an innocent or ignorant intermedi-

ary we 'll have him shadowed, and he 'll lead us to our man."

The two proceeded to the library to join Willmer. On the way up-stairs Riggs passed them, dressed for the street. He said that he had ordered Willmer's car and was on his way to the bank to obtain the money. It was twenty minutes past twelve, and Riggs expected to make the trip to the Columbus Circle institution and return by a quarter of one, which would leave fifteen minutes before the agent of the voices would appear.

As Riggs opened the street door a hearty voice rang out:

"Hello, Riggs! Mr. Willmer at home?"

"Yes, commissioner. He 's in his library."

"Never mind announcing me; I 'll run right up."

At the sound of the strange voice Corson and Fenwick halted on the staircase. As the huge form of the man appeared in the inner doorway Corson ran down the steps and greeted him with outstretched hand.

"Glad to see you, commissioner," he greeted. "But what on earth brings you here?"

"I might ask the same question, Corson,"

beamed the other. "My business is strictly social. I trust you are not here in your official capacity?"

Corson ignored the question and called to Fenwick.

"I want you to meet Deputy Police Commissioner Stacy," he announced. "Commissioner, shake hands with Mr. Bell of the telephone company."

"The great inventor himself, I suppose," grinned Stacy. "I should have expected to meet an older man."

Fenwick regarded with interest the huge, jovial dry-goods merchant whom the mayor had appointed as deputy police commissioner. The man had a winning personality, and Charlie mentally characterized him as a regular fellow.

"I stopped in to see Willmer for a minute," said Stacy.

"We were just going to join him in the library," observed Corson.

"Well, come along," invited the commissioner. "My business is n't private, if yours is n't."

They ascended the stairs and entered the library together.

"Hello, you old fossil!" shouted Stacy, giving Willmer's hand a hearty grasp.

"Old fossil yourself," retorted Willmer. "You're losing your hair pretty fast, John."

"And feeling fine, Warren. You don't look so well, though. What's the trouble?"

"Nothing much," returned Willmer gruffly. "How's Madeline?"

"About as frisky and expensive as most flapper daughters. And Lorraine? Hope she's at home. I've a message for both of you from Madeline. She's arranged a yachting party. Bermuda. Wants you both to come. The two kids can swim and ride, and we can fish and patronize the American bar at Nassau. What do you say?"

Willmer hesitated.

"I'd like Lorraine to go, John. She needs a change, and the trip would be excellent for her. But I'm afraid I can't get away."

"Nonsense. We won't sail for a week. I know Kirke's death has been a terrible blow, but we can't afford to lose you, too. Besides, it's time young King assumed some responsibility. Take care of all the matters resulting from Pendleton's death that really require your attention, and let Otis do the rest,



We 'll make the cruise as long or as short as you say."

Willmer presented what he regarded as further obstacles to the proposed trip, but Stacy lightly dismissed them. As he urged the financier to accompany him Riggs entered the room and, placing the envelope before his employer, retired. Willmer opened it, withdrawing a packet of new greenbacks. Fenwick glanced at his watch.

"I've told Riggs to watch the door and to bring the fellow right up when he comes," whispered Corson, and Charlie nodded understandingly.

Stacy continued to urge Willmer to join the yachting party, and Willmer continued to offer objections.

"Won't you help me, gentlemen?" pleaded the commissioner. "All of you may come. That American bar is quite an institution. Better men than Willmer have fallen for it!"

"You forget that some of us have to work for a living," Corson pointed out. "Persuade Mr. Willmer, by all means, if you can."

"I don't believe I can," confessed Stacy. "Where's Lorraine? If I can win her over I know that he 'll come."

Willmer apprised him of Lorraine's slight indisposition, and Stacy insisted on seeing her. At Corson's suggestion he and Fenwick went down-stairs.

"Stacy's quite a fellow," commented Corson. "He does n't let Willmer awe him a little bit. It's one o'clock, Charlie, and that fellow has n't shown up yet. I don't imagine he will, either. It would require superlative nerve to visit a man's home in broad daylight and steal a hundred thousand. Come to the window here. See that sporty fellow with the cane, passing the house? That's Sheridan—one of my men. The rough-looking chap on the corner is Campbell, a regular bloodhound when we let him loose. The others must be around somewhere."

"What are you fellows conspiring about?" demanded Stacy, swinging down the stairs.

Corson was so expectantly tense that he started nervously and then grinned sheepishly when he recognized the commissioner.

"Well, I won out, boys," boasted Stacy. "Lorraine's coming, and so is Willmer."

Corson accompanied Stacy to the outer steps, and shook hands with him.

"I've got some men watching this house,

commissioner," he whispered, "with instructions to nab any one who comes out. I think they know you, but I'd better stay here until you're gone."

"That *would* be funny," chuckled Stacy. "So-long, inspector."

As the commissioner entered his limousine Sheridan looked inquiringly toward Corson, who touched his badge significantly, at the same time shaking his head negatively. Sheridan signified that he understood, and the closed car swung up the Drive unmolested. Corson reëntered the house and rejoined Fenwick at the window.

"Ten minutes past one," announced Charlie. "You'll be disappointed if he does n't show up, won't you, inspector?"

"I'll say so," growled Corson, nervously chewing on a dry cigar.

"Corson!" exclaimed Willmer from the upper floor. "Hey, Corson!"

"Come, Charlie!" shouted the inspector. "I'll bet the fellow's got in the back way and is up-stairs!"

The two men ran up-stairs and stopped on the threshold of the library, sensing by Will-

mer's manner that something was wrong. The financier was ashen pale.

"Did you get him?" he demanded.

"Get who?" asked Corson.

"Who? Good God! Who do you think? Stacy! He's got my hundred thousand dollars!"



## CHAPTER XVII

### AND THERE CAME A VOICE

“**W**HAT nonsense is this?” demanded Corson, turning as white as Willmer. “Do you know who you are accusing?”

“Of course I do,” fumed Willmer. “I ’m accusing a deputy police commissioner, a reputable business man, a man who’s been my friend for years! This comes of trusting you. You—boob!”

He hesitated and bit the slang expression off sharply like a shot from a catapult. Corson was so taken back he could only stammer incoherently.

“Joke. It’s a joke,” he repeated loudly, as if to lend conviction to his words. “Must be. Mistake somewhere—sure to be. I’ll fix it up. Leave it to me.”

“Yah! Leave it to you!” bellowed Willmer. “I would n’t let you watch a ten-cent piece. Get out o’ here and stay out!”

“What happened, sir?” asked Fenwick.

Willmer eyed him shrewdly.

"I'll tie up to you, young fellow," he announced. "Stacy went in to see Lorraine and talked her into this trip. Then she talked me into it. I finally agreed to go. We discussed some of the details and then returned to the library.

" 'That ends my social visit, Warren,' said Stacy, picking up the money. 'I'm the man who was to call for this. You're doing a wise thing. Sorry I can't tell you more.' "

"With that he says good-by and walks out of the room, leaving me so astonished I couldn't talk. I was petrified, I guess. I confidently expected him to walk back into the room any minute and throw the money back on the table. When he didn't and I got my scattered wits together, I called for Corson, but it was too late then."

"Joke," repeated Corson monotonously. "I'll straighten it out. I'll see Stacy; I'll see the mayor."

"Get out!" roared Willmer, and Corson left the room in a hasty and undignified manner.

"Can you do anything, young man?" demanded Willmer.

"I still have nine and a half hours," re-

turned Fenwick. "I've never stopped working, and Boyden is out on the job now."

"I don't think I'll ever get the money back," declared Wilmer, "but I'd like to find out who the blackmailers really are."

"You don't think Commissioner Stacy is involved?"

"Certainly not. John Stacy is as straight as a string. He confidently believes he's done me a great service. Now that it's all over I'm not so sure but what he has."

"I think I can obtain the information you wish," announced Charlie. "Whether you liked it or not, I was going to see this case through to the finish."

"Very well. Get busy, my boy, and see what you can do."

Fenwick left the house immediately, and promptly at two o'clock presented himself at Diamond Jim Ordway's Broad Street offices. He sent in his card, and Ordway honored him by coming out in person to usher him into the luxurious inner office.

"Got a fellow in there who's trying to rob me," he complained jocularly. "Wants me to buy a button opal for five times what it's

worth. I'll get rid of him in a minute or two."

A little man, unmistakably Semitic, arose as they entered.

"Take it away, Kempner," ordered Diamond Jim, indicating the gorgeous fire-opal resting on a bit of tissue-paper on the desk. "I'm going to be busy."

"Thirty-six hundred?" suggested Kempner, in a final despairing effort at salesmanship.

"Three thousand dollars," returned Ordway, opening a check-book. "Which shall it be, 'Yes,' or 'Good afternoon'?"

"'Yes' and 'Good night,'" answered Kempner, who was not without a sense of humor. He accepted Ordway's check and departed. Diamond Jim passed the gem over to Fenwick.

"Worth five thousand," he chuckled. "Probably smuggled. Wish I could match it for cuff-links. Well, Charlie, what's on your mind?"

"Many things," responded Fenwick. "I'm working for Warren Willmer. Willmer's not very communicative, and at times I've reached the point where he's hindered rather than



helped me. I've guaranteed to complete my work for him by eleven o'clock to-night. I can't do it unless I learn all about Warren Willmer's early life. He's managed to keep out of 'Who's Who in America,' and the newspapers know precious little about him. I come to you with the idea that you may be able to help me out."

"You came to the right shop, Charlie," assured Ordway. "Willmer does n't care very much for me; our natures seem to clash. He used to upbraid me every time we met for wasting money on gewgaws as he termed my collection of jewelry. Warren is n't exactly a spendthrift you know. Well, sir, one fine day I took Tom Dickerson away from Willmer. Warren was paying Tom about three thousand a year to run a department. I offered Tom ten thousand. Willmer never forgave me. Tom had been with him for years. Of course I could tell you some things about Willmer, but Tom can tell you everything."

"What could you tell me?" quizzed Fenwick.

"Well, I know that he was born in Ithaca; that as a boy he sold newspapers on trains upstate, and that he met Art Carewe and hooked

up with him. They were pretty successful young men when they parted company. Willmer went to New York and joined forces with Pendleton Kirke and Otis King, Senior. Carewe remained up-state and was comfortably situated financially until shortly before his death."

"Was Art Carewe the father of Lorraine?" asked Charlie.

"Yes, and a fine chap he was. You'd better get your information first-hand, however. I'll take you in to Tom Dickerson. Tom will answer any questions you may ask."

Ordway led the way to an office scarcely less sumptuous than his own, and introduced Fenwick to Dickerson, advising the latter of the purpose of Charlie's visit. He then withdrew. Dickerson was a man of about fifty, who had grown up with the business of the triumvirate and had acted as a confidential assistant to Willmer. He was clean-cut, frank, and businesslike, and answered Fenwick's questions thoroughly, without wasting words. After a thirty-minute interview, Fenwick returned to Ordway's office.

"I can't tell you how glad I am that I made

this visit," he observed. "Your man Dickerson has given me invaluable information. One of the two men I am after comes from Ithaca, and I have definitely established some facts regarding Willmer's early life in that city, which will aid me considerably. I was groping in the dark before."

"Glad we were able to assist the famous phonic criminologist," smiled Ordway. "Anything else I can do, Charlie? I suppose you'll be coming to me one of these days for advice regarding the purchase of a diamond solitaire?"

Fenwick blushed.

"Ah-ha! Hit the nail, did I? Who is it? The charming Lorraine Carewe, or that pretty little stenographer back in Springfield? Miss Garrison was her name, I think."

"You're somewhat premature," Fenwick assured him.

"Am I? I wonder. Warren Willmer thinks a lot of that ward of his. You'd best be careful!"

"I'd best be going," grinned Charlie. "Your conversation runs miles ahead of the facts. Thank you for the assistance you've given me. I appreciate it."

Ordway waved a deprecating hand and invited Charlie to continue to call for assistance until his account was entirely squared.

This was a reference to Fenwick's recovery of the stolen jewels, and Charlie felt that he had never met a man so effusively grateful for a small service.

He left Ordway's office and decided to visit Branson's Ticket Agency. The office was fairly busy when he arrived, and he had an excellent opportunity to inspect the premises without exciting suspicion. It was divided into two parts. To the left of the entrance was the theatre ticket agency, with its racks of colored tickets, a long counter, telephone switchboard, and numerous shining black telephone instruments. The counter clerks, switchboard operator, and assistants were all young women. The clientele of the place appeared to be exceptionally high class.

To the right of the entrance a dozen cabinet phonograph models were on display, while at a side counter and on the shelves behind it was a fair supply of disk phonograph records. Along the walls were glass-inclosed, sound-proof booths, equipped with phonographs, for the convenience of customers who wished to try



records before purchasing them. A dignified glass sign announced:

BRANSON & BRANSON, DISTRIBUTORS  
CHAMPION PHONOGRAPHS

A pleasant-faced woman of thirty approached him.

"Waited on?" she inquired.

"I wish to see the proprietor," advised Charlie.

"I am Miss Branson."

"It may be rather difficult for me to explain my business, Miss Branson. It is in connection with an occurrence at this establishment last evening. The police have undoubtedly advised you that some one entered last night and used your telephones."

"Yes?" Her manner became frigid.

"May I ask if you are aware of the identity of the man?"

"It was reported to me this morning, but neither my sister nor I credited the story. We thought it purely a figment of the officer's imagination."

"There were two officers," continued Fenwick, "and I am in a position to corroborate their story."

"May I ask why *you* are interested in the matter?" inquired Miss Branson.

"I am a criminal investigator, Miss Branson, and am desirous of apprehending the man who used your telephone. He is wanted on a serious charge."

The woman hesitated.

"I scarcely think I can help you. The police advise me that entrance was effected by means of a key. My sister and I have keys, but none of my employees are provided with them. We employ no men. Really, Mr—er—"

"Bell," replied Fenwick.

"Mr. Bell, I think you had better apply to the two policemen for the information you require. They have promised to keep a watchful eye on the premises after hours. While we are annoyed at the incident, we are not particularly worried, since we feel that there is small possibility of theft on Broadway under the eyes of the police. I have n't the slightest notion of who the fellow was."

"Do you know Mr. Otis King?" asked Fenwick.

"The millionaire? How ridiculous! Of course not!"

The door of one of the booths opened, and the strains of a vocal selection rang through the room. Charlie started, then stood as though transfixed. It was a lullaby the singer sang, in a voice of remarkable purity and with unusual clearness of enunciation. It was not these facts alone that stimulated his interest, however. Instinctively, intuitively, as the song continued, he recognized that the singer was the Man with a Hundred Voices!

Fenwick specialized in the spoken word as a medium for detecting crime, and prided himself on his unusual talent for recognizing voices, reading character from them, indentifying and remembering their peculiarities. As he listened every doubt vanished and he was firmly convinced that he had stumbled over the link that was ultimately to lead to the arrest of the arch-blackmailer.

"What is that record?" he asked Miss Branson.

She again hesitated, and appeared to be vexed.

"A slumber song," she answered.

"Of course. But who is the singer?"

"Algernon Botsford. Not very popular."

"Well, I like his voice well enough to want to own that record."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"The girl at the counter will sell you one."

At the counter he asked to see the record. The salesgirl obtained it for him, and he examined the printed matter in the center of the disk. It was labeled "Slumber Song—Vocal—Algernon Botsford."

"I'll take it," he announced. "Where are these records made?"

"The Champion factory is over in Jersey. East Orange, I believe."

He thanked the girl, accepted the large flat parcel, and left the store. Without losing any time he returned to the Willmer home and went directly to the music-room. Carefully locking the doors, he unwrapped the record and placed it on the splendidly carved phonograph model of Sheraton design with which the room was equipped. He sought to confirm the conclusion he had previously reached.

He listened impatiently to the short introduction. Then the singer took up the song, and Charlie strained his ears to catch and identify the peculiarities of the voice. He



had no wide technical knowledge of music, but as the selection progressed he was quick to note the unusual range of the soloist's voice. Phonographic records of vocal selections are usually designated bass, barytone, or tenor. He was not slow to realize the reason for the omission in this case. The tones were convincingly barytone at the start, but when the refrain was reached the register appeared to be unmistakably tenor, and the singer negotiated the high notes with ridiculous ease. His was a freak voice.

At the conclusion of the song he readjusted the needle and repeated it. The voice was that of the man he sought; of that he was sure. It was a familiar voice, too, but defied identification. He doubted if he would recognize it, were he in the presence of the singer, since his recollection of its strange qualities seemed to be based almost entirely on the mysterious telephone conversations.

The phonograph, like the telephone, produced the same slight distortations in the human voice. Algernon Botsford, he decided, was the Man with a Hundred Voices, but who was Algernon Botsford.

Hastily he consulted a telephone directory

and, obtaining the telephone number of the Champion Phonograph Company, placed a call.

"I should like to speak with the man in charge of your vocal artists," he said, when his call was answered.

"I will connect you with Mr. Poole," the private branch exchange operator told him. After a short wait a masculine voice answered.

"My name is Bell, Mr. Poole. I'd like to know if you can give me any information regarding Algernon Botsford, one of your artists."

Mr. Poole chuckled.

"Who are you, Mr. Bell? A rival phonograph man, or a theatrical booking agent? What kind of information do you want?"

"I'm a telephone man, Mr. Poole, and merely wish to confer with Mr. Botsford regarding some transmission and reproduction experiments I've been making which involved one of his records. Where and how may I get in touch with him, please?"

Poole hesitated.

"I don't know that I can help you, Mr. Bell," he answered. "The artist's real name is not Algernon Botsford. He does not wish

us to divulge his real name for personal reasons. I don't care to assume responsibility for furnishing the information, but if you'll hold the wire I'll put the matter up to our general manager."

Fenwick thanked him and waited. In five minutes Poole returned.

"Our G. M. also refuses to furnish the information. He believes that you should obtain it from Mr. Stewart, our president."

"How can I get in touch with Mr. Stewart?" asked Fenwick.

"I'm afraid you can't. He's in San Francisco."

"H-m. Stung again," mused Fenwick. "Could you tell me where he is stopping?"

"He always stops at the St. Francis Hotel," advised Poole. "If you're very anxious you'd better write him at once, as he'll be starting East within a few days."

Charlie shook his head dubiously as he hung up the receiver. Once more he had been balked at the very threshold of success. He removed the record from the machine, placed it in its paper jacket, and carried it up to his room. Upon endeavoring to use his extension telephone he found that it was not connected

with central, and his signal apparently went unnoticed in the housekeeper's room.

He slammed the receiver on the hook and decided to use the instrument in the library, which was usually connected with a trunk. In the library, however, he encountered Warren Willmer. The financier was reading the newspapers and appeared to be in fairly good spirits.

"How are you feeling, sir?" asked Fenwick.

"Fine. Learn anything."

"Quite a bit, sir. The trail is apparently leading us up-state. In fact, I should n't be surprised if it would take us to Ithaca, your old home town."

Willmer glowered.

"That so?" he snapped testily. "H-m. Yes, I supposed it would. What else?"

"I've found out the name of our mystery man."

Willmer leaned forward anxiously.

"Who is it?" he demanded.

"He calls himself Algernon Botsford," said Fenwick. "Ever hear the name?"

"Never."

"I thought not. It's assumed. I've been trying to learn his real name. Unfortunately,



there's only one man who can tell me, and he's in San Francisco."

Willmer studied Fenwick reflectively.

"Young man," he announced deliberately, "you're either the sweetest faker I ever met or you're having an unprecedented run of hard luck. Which is it?"

"Hard luck, sir. But I still have seven hours, remember. I'm going to ask this chap in Frisco to give me Botsford's real name and after that it will be plain sailing."

"He's over three thousand miles away," objected Willmer. "How are you going to ask him?"

Fenwick laid his hand on the telephone instrument.

"By means of this," he smiled. "The telephone is going to help me clean up on time. Were a voice loud enough to be heard from New York to San Francisco it would take the sound four hours to travel that distance through the air. It would take me four hours more to get the answer. That would mean eight hours, and I have only seven. But, once I get my party on the wire, this magic instrument will speed my voice to Frisco in one-

fifteenth of a second, or at the rate of fifty-six thousand miles per second!"

"Some traveling!" commented Willmer. "Who's going to foot the bill?"

Fenwick considered it good policy to indulge the millionaire in his parsimony.

"I sort of figured on charging it up to Mr. Reeves," he advised.

"Good enough!" approved Willmer. "Go ahead!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CORSON IS ENLIGHTENED

**W**ILLMER sat listening while Fenwick placed his call to Mr. Stewart at San Francisco on a person-to-person basis.

"How is Miss Carewe?" asked Charlie as he replaced the receiver.

"Much better," responded Willmer. "She's quite fed up with lying in bed all day and threatens to join us at dinner this evening, providing we taboo all references to the voices. Young King is coming to take dinner with us at Lorraine's invitation. I have a sneaking notion that Otis intends to pop the question this evening. They'll make a splendid couple, Bell."

Fenwick was silent.

"What's the matter?" demanded Willmer. "You don't seem to enthuse over the idea."

"I shall certainly make it a point to congratulate both of them," advised Fenwick, "if Miss Carewe accepts King."

"She will," assured Willmer. "She's discouraged him, half-heartedly, in the past, but I have n't any doubt regarding her attitude now."

"You won't mind if I ask Inspector Corson to join us after dinner?" queried Fenwick.

"What for?" demanded Willmer bluntly.

"Corson's worked hard, Mr. Willmer, and is deserving of consideration. I think we should ask him to sit in at the conclusion of the case."

"He let Stacy walk off with my money," objected Willmer.

"If his scheme had been successful you'd be singing his praises right now, sir. It turned out disastrously and you're condemning him. Inspector Corson is a capable and efficient police officer. I regret that I didn't see fit to play fair with him, but his manner nettled me. It is my fault that he has n't made better progress on your case."

"Why?"

"I've permitted him to spend most of his time running down the murder of Pendleton Kirke. I've made it difficult for him to solve the mystery of Kirke's death. He assumed that there was some relation between that



tragedy and the voices, and lost considerable time endeavoring to substantiate his theory. If you'll sanction his presence this evening I'll go into that matter and acquaint all of you with the facts in the case."

"I'm willing," Willmer grumbled.

"Good enough."

"We dine at seven. Better have him here at eight thirty. Where's Boyden?"

"I don't know," confessed Fenwick. "He's been gone all day. I hardly think we need worry about him, though. Seth's trying to find the instrument that is cut in on your line, and he's apparently having a hard time of it."

"Perhaps it was removed just as soon as Stacy walked off with my money," Willmer conjectured.

"That sounds reasonable," said Charlie.

"I should have thought the fellow would have had the courtesy to acknowledge receipt of the money. Then I'd feel sure that this wretched business was really ended."

Fenwick smiled.

"It's ended," he assured the financier. "I'm so positive of it that I'm going to my room to pack Seth's things and my own.

"We'll take the first train back to Springfield in the morning."

"Quite confident, aren't you? Don't you intend to see Reeves before you return?"

"Only if I fail. If I am successful I shall expect you to acquaint Mr. Reeves with the fact."

Willmer nodded approvingly.

"Good dope," he commented. "There's a great deal of the actor about you, my boy. You seem to have a flair for the dramatic."

"I love it," confessed Fenwick frankly. "I always like to stage-manage my shows. An audience helps, too. I'm glad you've permitted me to invite Corson, and that Otis King is to be with us. Until I hear from Stewart at Frisco I'm going to ask Riggs and the rest of the servants not to leave the house. Miss Carewe will be with us, of course. The only characters we lack are James Cartier and—Algernon Botsford!"

"They seem to be the two most important characters," reminded Willmer dryly. "We'll leave Lorraine out of our council of war. She's had a bad attack of nervousness, and is just about shaking it off. No need of alarm-

ing her again. I'll be glad when we join Stacy's yachting party."

"Does Miss Carewe know of Mr. Stacy's part in the occurrences of this noon?"

"Of course. She's only two doors away from this room, and heard me shout to Corson. I had to tell her. She still thinks it a huge joke, just as I did, at first. By the way, Bell, what did you mean by saying that you wanted to be sure that Riggs did not leave the house until after you heard from Frisco?"

Fenwick shrugged his shoulders and spread his palms non-committally.

"Who can tell, sir?"

The financier seemed lost in thought.

"I wonder if you're right," he mused. His jaw straightened. "If you are," he declared, "I'll never trust a living soul again."

"I don't want to destroy your faith in human nature, sir. You place the wrong construction on my anxiety to have Riggs within doors. It's a purely impersonal proposition at the present time. As a matter of fact, I'm somewhat more anxious to be assured of your presence this evening. You won't disappoint me, will you?"

"That's a hell of a thing to say!" snapped

Willmer. "If I was n't afraid of losing my temper I'd ask you what you meant by it."

The ringing of the telephone bell relieved the situation. Fenwick answered. It was the long-distance operator calling to report that Stewart was not expected at the hotel until seven o'clock, and that arrangements would be made to establish a connection at that time.

Charlie advised Willmer.

"Seven o'clock in San Francisco means ten o'clock here," he observed. "More delay."

"You're a Jonah," commented Willmer good-naturedly as he left the room.

Charlie called Pierson, the Riverside wire-chief, in an endeavor to obtain information regarding Boyden. The wire-chief reported that he had received several calls from Seth during the day, but that he had no definite knowledge of where he might be found or what he had accomplished.

Fenwick then telephoned Corson, and after some persuasion obtained the inspector's promise that he would be present at 8:30. He then went to his room, packed his bag and Seth's, and snatched a little sleep.

Shortly before seven o'clock Otis King arrived and joined Willmer, Fenwick, and



Lorraine Carewe at dinner. Seth had not appeared, and Fenwick began to worry. The dinner was not a huge success, although King endeavored to imbue it with life, chaffing and jesting with characteristic ease.

Willmer, reflecting on the manner in which he had been relieved of a tremendous amount of money, was in no mood to respond to King's sallies. Fenwick was tense with excitement and expectation regarding the development he anticipated later in the evening, and Lorraine Carewe had not fully recovered from her indisposition and merely rewarded King's best efforts with a faint smile. The conversation was forced and lacked spontaneity, since none of them could quite banish the fact that grim tragedy had stalked among them and that Pendleton Kirke was dead.

They did not leave the table until Riggs announced the presence of Corson.

"We'll see Mr. Corson in the library, Riggs," said Willmer, proceeding in that direction.

"Shall I see you before you leave us?" asked Lorraine, directing her question to Fenwick.

"I shall probably leave about eleven o'clock,"

he ventured optimistically. "I would like to say good-bye."

"That's rather late," she murmured with a slight frown. Then shyly, "I will make it a point to be in the music-room at ten, though."

"So will I," he promised, thrilled by the implied interest she took in him.

King approached as she was moving away.

"I'll join you in the music-room in a minute, Lorry," he observed. "I want to have a word with Bell."

The girl nodded and moved off, leaving the two young men. King tendered Fenwick a cigar, accepted a light, and paused as if uncertain as to how to begin.

"This is a rather delicate proposition, Bell," he began, "and I don't know just how to handle it, so I'm going to do it just as my dad would have. The governor was a great hand for frankness and plain speaking, and I've always felt he had the right idea."

Fenwick concurred with a nod of the head, and King continued.

"I'm not blind, Bell; in fact, I pride myself on being gifted a bit in sizing up people. You are interested in Lorraine Carewe. If

I 'm wrong in any of my statements I wish you 'd correct me."

Fenwick avoided King's eyes and blew a smoke ring.

"Continue," he suggested somewhat uncomfortably.

"I have asked Miss Carewe to do me the great honor of becoming my wife, and twice she has refused. To-night—in a few minutes, in fact—I shall ask her again. I am hoping that on this occasion she will regard my proposal with favor. I might add that Mr. Willmer knows of my intentions and indorses them. I am telling you this merely to obviate any embarrassment which might result for either of us if we were unaware of the facts. Perhaps you may have some disclosures of a similar nature to make. If you have I 'll be glad to listen."

Fenwick made a heroic effort to repel the sheer diffidence that always asserted itself when he was confronted with a matter involving sentiment. That he succeeded was undoubtedly due to King's manner of presenting the subject. He walked over to the young financier and gripped his arm.

"King," he said, "you 're a regular fellow.

How you suspected or knew the state of my feelings is a mystery to me. I don't know another man with whom I could rationally discuss a matter of this kind. I'm flustered and uncomfortable as it is. I've known Miss Carewe for only two days, and I'll admit that I'm pretty hard hit. For an hour I've been trying to decide whether or not it would be unmitigated nerve if I asked to be numbered among her friends, and to hint at the respect and regard I feel toward her. Good Lord, I'd never dare go further than that!"

"Why not?" queried King in a matter-of-fact manner.

"There are any number of reasons," answered Fenwick. "Miss Carewe does n't even know my real name. She's the ward of a millionaire; I'm a telephone wire-chief, receiving a modest salary. I've made her acquaintance by chance, and could scarcely presume to impose on Mr. Willmer's hospitality."

"Bosh!" pronounced King coolly. "Lorraine is almost penniless, and is earning her own living. She has no social pretensions and is absolutely democratic. I see nothing presumptuous whatever in your desire to acquaint



her with the state of your feelings. She's interested in you, I know. However, you are the best and final judge. I've told you what I thought you should know."

"I appreciate it," Fenwick assured him. "If felicitations are in order when next we meet, I want you to know right now that there will be nothing insincere about those I will offer."

"Thank you," responded King with a firm clasp of the hand. "I'll see you later."

When Fenwick entered the library Willmer and Corson were silently smoking, and the situation was apparently constrained. The inspector's pride had suffered grievously, as a result of Willmer's hasty and intemperate dismissal of him earlier in the day. Conversation consisting largely of generalities had failed to restore the *entente cordiale*, and, in an endeavor to relieve the situation, Charlie immediately introduced a topic of mutual interest.

"While we are waiting," he announced, "I think it might be a good plan to consider the matter of Pendleton Kirke's death."

The two men showed immediate signs of interest.

"Why not wait for King?" suggested Willmer.

"No need to," advised Fenwick. "King knows as much about it as I do. As I understand it, Mr. Kirke received telephonic messages from the voices, just as his partners did. Mr. Willmer urged him to arm himself, fearing physical injury, and prevailed upon him to accept a box of cartridges designed for an automatic revolver. This was night before last. Kirke had no knowledge of firearms, but had a notion that the ammunition would serve for a somewhat antiquated revolver which he had at home. He dropped the cartridges into his pocket, and King then drove him to Newton. Arriving at his home—"

"On the way to his home," interrupted Corson, "Kirke and King quarreled. That's important."

Fenwick smiled.

"As Inspector Corson points out," continued Fenwick, "Kirke and King quarreled on the way home. King admits that the quarrel was due to his belief that Kirke could clear up the mystery of the voices if he cared to be frank. Arriving at the house, Kirke requested King to wait while he obtained some

documents requiring the young man's signature. Kirke was admitted by Peters, his butler, and he seized the opportunity to request Peters to hunt up the old revolver previously referred to. Then he entered his study.

"At my request Mr. King entered the house, and we conversed for a few moments while Peters went to the trunk-room to find the revolver. Suddenly we heard a report like a revolver-shot, and the rooms were plunged in darkness. King shouted for Peters, and the butler came down-stairs with the old revolver in his hand. We went to the switch-box, located a blown fuse, replaced it, and restored the lights. Then we hurried to Kirke's study and found his lifeless body. The cartridges given him by Mr. Willmer were scattered all over his desk and rug."

"We've been all over this before," objected Corson. "You're not telling us anything new!"

"I'm going to in a moment, inspector. After Peters telephoned Dr. Rush at my request he returned to Kirke's study to assist me. The room was very dimly lit by an electrolier depending from the ceiling, and I requested more light. Peters brought me a brass desk-

light which he had cleaned for Mr. Kirke, and we placed it on the desk and plugged it in. Then we searched for the fifty cartridges, and found only forty-nine. One of them was missing. Suddenly I noticed a perforation in a letter-file across the room. It told me the whole story. The empty cartridge-shell had perforated the hollow file! I verified my suspicions and found the cartridge inside the file. I sent the file out to King's car and brought it back to New York with me."

"Wait a minute; wait a minute!" exclaimed Corson excitedly. "I see it all! That was a mean trick to play on me, Charlie."

"I fail to see anything at all," announced Willmer, bewildered.

"He covered up the evidence," protested Corson. "He was perfectly right; Kirke's death was neither murder nor suicide!"

"Then what was it?" demanded the financier.

"I'll let Corson tell you, now that he has all the facts," suggested Charlie.

"Easy," assured Corson. "Kirke was in the room for a few minutes while King and Fenwick were talking. He may have been searching his pockets for the key to the center drawer



of his desk, which contained the papers he sought. As he felt in his pocket he encountered the box of cartridges. He threw them on his desk, and the paper box broke, scattering them all about. Simultaneously the shot occurred and the lights went out. Pendleton Kirke's death was accidental!"

"Right," agreed Charlie.

"But what mysterious agency discharged the cartridge?" queried Willmer.

"Kirke was probably seated before the desk when he tossed the cartridges on it," explained Corson. "Flush with the glass top of the desk where it rested against the wall was an electric light socket. The key was turned on. One of the cartridges entered this socket, and the current immediately caused the metal base of the cartridge to melt. It was discharged at Kirke in almost the same manner that it would have been fired from a revolver!"

"Is that possible?" demanded Willmer, turning to Fenwick.

"It happened, sir. When the cartridge came in contact with the current a bow of flame was produced by the arc-ing, as an electrician would word it, and the cartridge was discharged. The thing can be demonstrated at

any time by an open socket and a cartridge. The shell was propelled from the socket with considerable force, crossed the room and perforated the file."

"Poor Kirke!" murmured Willmer. "And I gave him those cartridges."

"Your motives could scarcely be criticized, sir," observed Fenwick. "It was an accident."

"The newspapers must be advised," decided Willmer. "That is important from every angle. Pendleton Kirke's death was accidental. But how was it, Inspector Corson, that you failed to recognize the facts earlier?"

"When I arrived the desk-lamp was plugged in the socket," Corson pointed out. "Fenwick failed to inform me that it had been placed on the desk subsequent to the tragedy and that he had removed the file. Why did you conceal the information from me?"

The inspector's tone was somewhat bitter.

"It was scarcely ethical, I will admit," Fenwick answered. "Your manner nettled me, however, and I felt sure that you would solve the problem in no time at all. If you didn't I figured that you would leave me severely alone, while I engaged in a duel with the

voices. A probable murder would look like bigger game to you."

"And I fell for it," mused Corson disgustingly. "I deserved the treatment I got. The solution was right under my nose all the time."

Otis King strolled into the room, his hands deep in his trousers' pockets, and a significant expression on his face.

"May I sit down and listen in?" he asked.

"Sure," assented Willmer, eying him keenly. "How 'd you make out?"

"Rotten!" answered King dejectedly. "I 'm as undesirable as ever, I guess!"

## CHAPTER XIX

AT TEN O'CLOCK

SOON after King joined the group in the library Seth Boyden put in an appearance. The little man had lost his chipper, agile appearance and was unmistakably fatigued. Fenwick offered him a chair, and Seth dropped into it listlessly.

"What luck?" demanded Charlie.

"None at all," responded Seth wearily.

"Then, too, mebbe I've been lucky. I don't know for sure."

"Suppose you tell us your experiences."

"Sure. There are quite a number o' high-class duplex apartment-houses around here. I've been in all of 'em. They all have cable-boxes in the basement, the house-cable running from the street. Each contains about twenty-five cable-conductors, or pairs. Sometimes the terminals or conductors are multiplied in several houses on the block. I learned all this from Pierson. The pairs for



this house appear in the house cables in three near-by apartment-houses."

"Just a minute, Seth," interrupted Corson, who had gained more than ordinary knowledge of telephony through his previous association with Fenwick. "As I understand it, each of these pairs or conductors is the terminal of a telephonic circuit. There are twenty-five in a house-cable. How would the voices know which pair to select if they contemplated tapping the wire or cutting in a station?"

"They'd have to do just what a telephone man would do," said Seth. "They'd take one pair at a time and ask the operator the telephone-number, until they got the one they wanted."

"I see."

"I tried the three apartments and one private residence," continued Seth, "and nary a thing did I find. Cable-box looked all right in every case, and no signs of a cut-in instrument. There didn't seem to be any logical reason for doin' it, but I determined to inspect all the telephone equipment in each place I visited. That's what I've been doin', and I

can see now how foolish I've been to lose so much time."

"So you really have n't accomplished a thing?" queried Willmer. The question was directed with the idea of arousing Boyden, and Fenwick recognized that fact.

"That's not quite fair, Mr. Willmer," he interposed before Boyden could answer. "You pointed out this afternoon that it would be logical for the voices to disconnect the hidden station now that they have no further use for it. Would n't that account for Seth's failure to find it?"

"He was looking for it all morning," pointed out Willmer, "and it was used at noon."

"True," agreed Charlie. "For that reason I feel that he should have found it." He turned to Seth. "I know you're tired, Seth, but you've got to get busy again. There's only one more place to look. Have a try, and when you come back all I want you to say is 'Yes' or 'No.'"

Boyden jumped from his chair, his dejection vanishing completely.

"I get you, Charlie," he announced. "It's got to be 'Yes.'"

"That's right, Seth," repeated Fenwick.  
"It's got to be 'Yes.' "

The little man hurried from the room, and Willmer, King, and Corson regarded Fenwick inquiringly.

"Two little words are all I need to complete the entire case," advised Charlie.

"What are they?" quizzed Corson.

"I want 'Yes' from Boyden, and a name from San Francisco."

The telephone rang, and Fenwick hurried to answer it. The long-distance operator announced that she had obtained his party in San Francisco, and inquired if he was ready.

"Hello, Mr. Stewart," began Charlie.  
"My name is Bell. I am employed by the telephone company and have been engaged in some transmission experiments involving the use of phonograph records."

"Yes, Mr. Bell," answered Stewart; and the connection was so good that Fenwick could not conceive of the speaker's being more than three thousand miles distant. "What can I do for you?"

"I used one of your records, and now find it necessary to get in touch with the artist who made it. His name is Algernon Botsford,

but your factory people at East Orange tell me it is a professional name and refuse to divulge the real one. They referred me to you. Will you furnish me with the name and address?"

The three men watched Fenwick expectantly as he picked up a pencil and drew a writing-pad toward him.

"No, I won't forget it," he promised Stewart. "Thank you very much." He failed to use the pencil, however, and Corson seemed disappointed.

"Well, who is Algernon Botsford?" demanded Wilmer as the conversation terminated.

Fenwick deliberately consulted his watch and smiled.

"Ten o'clock," he murmured. "I've a very brief engagement with Miss Carewe at ten, so you'll have to excuse me for a few minutes. Besides, I only have one of my two words. I'm still waiting for Seth."

In the music-room he found Lorraine strumming the keys of the piano idly and softly.

"How punctual!" she commented.

"It's surprising that I'm not ahead of time," he assured her,



"And are you through with the case," she asked, "and ready to leave us? Tell me, who is the Man with a Hundred Voices?"

"I'm not quite through," he answered gravely, "although I know his name. There is still half an hour's work to be done, and Seth is doing it. Until he finishes I don't care to divulge the name. I might be wrong, you see, and would lose considerable prestige."

"You are discretion itself, Mr. Bell. How does Mr. Willmer seem this evening? He insists that the ridiculous transaction in which Mr. Stacy participated to-day is serious, although I've tried to persuade him that it's a joke."

"You've done your part, then," commented Fenwick. "On the whole, I should say that Mr. Willmer's state of mind is better than it has been in days. He actually seems relieved, and the loss of the money does n't seem to have worried him as much as one would believe. I think that if he were assured that the trouble was over he'd be perfectly reconciled to the whole thing. This afternoon he remarked somewhat indignantly that the voices could at least have acknowledged receipt of the money they received."

"Isn't that like the old dear? I'll wager he said it seriously and meant it humorously. So you expect to know all about the voices within a half-hour? I won't hear the story until after you've gone, will I?"

"You won't, unless you join us," he answered. "Why not come in for a few minutes? It would be nice of you. I may never see you again, you know."

"How lugubrious!" she laughed. "One would fancy you really meant it. But Mr. Willmer objects; he thinks the voices are bad for my nerves. Shall I risk his displeasure, and join you men in the library shortly?"

"Please do. Just remember that in another day I'll be back at my telephonic grind, while in a week you'll be sailing for semi-tropical seas."

She had fenced with him skilfully, and had succeeded in discouraging every attempt to lift the conversation from a commonplace, impersonal basis. At this more obvious effort her brows wrinkled and her smile disappeared. She seemed to make a quick mental decision, and almost immediately the smile reappeared.

"You're a nice boy," she announced, "and you say nice things, so I'm going to do as you

ask. Furthermore, I'm going to tell you a secret. When Mr. Stacy invited me on the yachting party and asked me to use my influence to get Mr. Willmer to go, I agreed to accept if he would let me invite a friend. He assented, and I've invited the friend, although no one else knows who it is. The man I've invited is my fiancé. That's part of the secret. The day we sail I'm going to be married, and the trip will be our honeymoon. That's all of it."

Fenwick was staggered, and she was quick to realize it.

"When we return we shall probably live in New York, and I'll want you to visit us and meet my husband. He's a splendid chap, and I know you'll like each other. I'd prefer not to tell you more just now. May I rely on you to keep my secret?"

"You may," he assured her, regaining his composure. "I trust that you will be very, very happy. And now I'll go back to the library and listen to Seth's report."

"I'll be there very soon," she announced; and he left the room.

Almost immediately after he rejoined the men in the library Boyden hurried in,

"What 's the answer, Seth?" asked Charlie.

"Yes!" shouted Seth.

"Good! That just about cleans everything up. Miss Carewe is coming in in a few minutes; wants to be in at the finish. We 'll wait for her."

The telephone gave a short, scarcely perceptible ring.

"Mr. Willmer's residence," Charlie announced.

"The voices!" responded the calling party. "Please tell Mr. Willmer to keep faith with us. He has continued his efforts to learn who we are and to apprehend us. If he desists, he will not be annoyed. If he insists upon pursuing the matter further, we will not feel bound to observe our agreement."

The voice was that of the person who had carried on the final negotiations resulting in the payment of the blackmail.

"You must be mistaken," answered Fenwick. "Mr. Willmer is quite content to let the matter drop, and has already done so."

"That 's a lie!" was the response. "Inspector Corson is with him now. If he is not continuing his investigations, what are you doing there, Mr. Bell?"



"My name is not Bell," answered Charlie. "You must have the wrong party. *My name is Charlie Fenwick!*"

A muffled exclamation came over the wire.

"Furthermore," continued Charlie Fenwick, "your voice is the voice of Algernon Botsford, and I have just learned Algernon Botsford's real name!"

The voice made no response, and Fenwick again took up the conversation.

"I think I have made my knowledge of the facts quite clear, and any attempt at evasion or escape will be futile. You will please follow my directions. Come to the library of Mr. Willmer's home. I should prefer to have you come voluntarily, but if you won't it will merely be a matter of minutes to fetch you here, and at the same time I'll deprive you of your telephone. Will you come?"

"Yes," assented the voice, and hung up.

Fenwick placed a chair so that it faced the men, who were grouped in a semicircle.

"For Mr. Algernon Botsford," he announced. "He should be here in a moment."

"Footsteps!" whispered Corson.

They were silent, and could hear some one approaching the room. In a moment the

footsteps were close at hand, and then Lorraine Carewe stood in the doorway.

"Good evening, gentlemen," she greeted, smiling upon them indiscriminately. "Am I too late? Is all the excitement over?"

"No, Miss Carewe," answered Charlie. "In fact, it's just beginning. Won't you take this chair?"

She accepted it with a word of thanks.

"Gentlemen," announced Fenwick, indicating Willmer's ward, "permit me to introduce the Girl with a Hundred Voices!"

## CHAPTER XX

### REVELATIONS

**A**NGRY mutters escaped Willmer and Corson at Fenwick's astounding announcement. Otis King turned pale, and even Boyden seemed stunned. The accused girl bravely held up her head and continued to smile as she met each pair of eyes in turn without flinching.

"What hellish nonsense is this?" demanded Willmer gruffly.

"Don't make an utter ass of yourself, Fenwick!" reproved Corson.

Charlie merely sat down and waited. Lorraine realized that he was waiting for her to speak, and she did not hesitate.

"It's quite true—all of it," she announced. "I am the voices."

"You don't know what you are saying, child," put in Willmer. "You are still nervous and distraught. Go to your room, and I will talk with you later."

She smiled and shook her head negatively.

"I think I 'd better stay," she decided. "I know what I 'm saying, and all of you know it to be true. I 've fancied all along that when this time came I would face my ordeal with considerable trepidation, but now that it 's here I don't mind it a bit. I 've a notion it 's going to be pretty good fun."

"Lorraine!" rebuked Willmer.

"Don't worry, sir," she advised. "I won't say too much. Mr. Fenwick will probably do most of the talking." She turned to him. "So you obtained the last two bits of information you required, did n't you? Will you tell me how?"

"Assuredly, Miss Carewe," he answered, willingly. "When Seth established the fact that the cut-in station was not hooked up at any of the cable-boxes he visited, we knew that the only other place to look was here in the house. What did you find, Seth?"

"Concealed wire to a clothes-closet in Miss Carewe's room, sir. A magneto-set with battery, and a double-throw switch, just as you suspected. No amateur job, either."

"Of course not," commented Fenwick. "It was installed by Cartier. As for the other



bit of information, Miss Carewe, I obtained it from a Mr. Stewart, who is now in San Francisco. He assured me that Algernon Botsford was not a man, but a woman named Lorraine Carewe. He said that Miss Carewe had a remarkable and curious voice which could only be described as a natural female barytone. I have heard two other voices like yours, Miss Carewe. One was in vaudeville; the other, on the concert stage. Neither, however, had the range of yours, and only the vaudeville performer had the talent for mimicry which you possess."

"So that is how the voices knew of every action taken by the triumvirate," murmured Willmer, evidently convinced. "You were in my confidence, of course, and used the information to best advantage. Why did you torture me, Lorraine?"

"Money," she answered briefly. "Shall I say more?"

"No—not now," he interposed hastily. "I should have known it was you. I knew of your talent for imitating the voices of others, but you threw me completely off the track with your elaborate system of deceptions. How often you pretended to receive calls from

the voices during my absence, or when you sat in my office and answered the telephone while I was present! But what is this I hear about phonograph records?"

"I asked you a long time ago to permit me to make use of my voice commercially, but you flatly refused. Said that it was n't necessary to resort to such means to earn a livelihood, and that I could always make my home with you. I obtained a try-out with the Champion Phonograph Company while I was staying with the Camerons, in South Orange. My voice reproduced remarkably well. I told Mr. Stewart and Mr. Poole of the Champion Company that I did n't want to use my own name, and Mr. Stewart suggested that I use a man's name. He claims it has helped the sale of records, too."

"I meant well, Lorraine," explained Willmer apologetically. "You know how I've looked forward to a match between you and Otis. I felt that if you ever went upon the operatic or concert stage, or used your voice professionally in any way, you would never renounce a career for marriage."

"I knew that, of course," she answered, directly. "I thought, however, that I had

made it perfectly clear to you that I would never marry Otis, who has been a splendid big brother to me. He's been more than that, for I believe that he's suspected my relation to the voices, and has protected me. Isn't that so, Otis?"

The young financier nodded.

"I was n't sure," he explained, "until I saw you steal down to the switchboard, night before last. You pulled out the plugs which connected the 'phones in Fenwick's room and Boyden's room with central. Then you returned to your own room. I returned to mine, directly behind you, and Boyden almost caught me."

"Was your car really stolen, Mr. King?" asked Corson.

"Yes," answered Otis, "although Nick really only meant to borrow it. He would have returned it."

"What had he been doing in this house?"

"I think I can answer that," volunteered Fenwick. "Something had gone wrong with the equipment he had installed for Miss Carewe, and she had sent for him to have the necessary repairs made."

"And what did Nick whisper to you as we rode down in your car from the Grand Central?" quizzed Corson.

"He whispered, 'Don't get Miss Carewe in trouble.' That verified my suspicions, and that is why I made no effort to stop him when he endeavored to escape. Incidentally, the telephone-call which afforded Nick an opportunity to make a get-away occurred right after Lorraine left the room. When I learned later that the calling party had impersonated Mr. Willmer, I was certain that Lorraine had telephoned, because I know what stunts she could do with her voice."

"But you were sure of Miss Carewe's complicity from the time you saw her at the switchboard, weren't you?" pressed Corson. "Didn't you make that call from the Grand Central to the Willmer Building yesterday morning?"

"I did," admitted King. "I felt that if such a call occurred while Lorraine was with Fenwick, it would divert suspicion from her."

"It did for a while," admitted Fenwick. "What are your relations with the Branson girls, Miss Carewe?"



“Ethel, the younger, took music lessons with me at Professor Riccardi’s studio. I knew her at home, in Ithaca.”

“I see. So when you learned that we suspected the voices of using a cut-in instrument on one of Mr. Willmer’s lines, you decided to obtain the use of the telephonic equipment in the Branson office. You pretended to retire, but left the house, obtained the key from Ethel Branson and motored down town. Whose clothes did you wear?”

She blushed.

“Mr. King’s,” she answered. “He had left them with Riggs, to be called for at some time by his man. You gave me a particularly thrilling chase, Mr. Fenwick.”

“My sentiments, exactly,” chuckled Charlie.

“But where does this fellow Cartier, or Nick, fit in the picture?”

“I think Miss Carewe had better explain that,” responded Charlie.

“His name is James Cartier,” she began. “We went to high school together, and attended the same coeducational college. We’ve been friends since childhood; I suppose our mutual interest in music was responsible for that. James became an electrical engineer,

but did not achieve much success commercially. He's very erratic and is not a good business man. He's imaginative and inventive, and has the artistic temperament.

"After he graduated he obtained several successive positions which he gave up because he found routine work irksome. Then he came to New York and took a job with the telephone company as an installer. I flattered myself that he did it to be near me, and endeavored to persuade him to follow his profession, but he'd just laugh and insist that he had a very definite object in learning something about telephony. He assisted in the installation of the loud-speaking telephones at Madison Square Garden, which were used to transmit President Harding's speech at the burial of the Unknown Soldier. That was what he had been after all the time, and it gave him an opportunity to conduct some secret experiments. James has established the fact that perfect phonographic reproductions of the human voice can be made, using the loud-speaker to transmit the voice to the blank master record. He's made application for patents, and is going into the business of manufacturing records after—after—"

"After what, Lorraine?" asked Willmer, gently.

"After we are married, sir."

"What?" roared Willmer. "Married? I'll never consent to it! You've been imposed upon, my child, by a half-baked genius who is also a fortune-hunter. You'll give up the notion of marrying him at once. I promised your father that I'd take care of you, and I mean to do it. If you want to marry Otis, all right. If you don't, you'll stay right here with me, instead of running off with this picturesque and imaginative villain who induces you to torture, torment, and blackmail your guardian. Incidentally, where is my money?"

"Mr. Stacy still has it and is holding it for you," she responded. "He's perfectly in sympathy with everything I've done, even to slightly drugging you, but he won't give me the money without your consent. I'm going to marry James. He's good, handsome, imaginative, and romantic as you suggest, and somewhat picaresque. Oh, I'm not denying that he's a bit of a rogue! That's one of the reasons I love him. We are going to be married next week, *with your consent*, and will honeymoon to Bermuda on Commissioner

Stacy's yacht. Is there anything else, sir? If there is n't, I should like to go to my room. I'm tired."

The strain appeared to be telling on her, and, despite her efforts at self-control, her lips trembled.

"Go to your room, child," muttered Willmer hoarsely. "We'll continue our conversation in the morning.

"Thank you," she acknowledged gratefully. "Good night."

She paused in front of Fenwick and extended her hand, which he clasped firmly.

"Next to James and Otis, I like Charlie Fenwick," she announced. "He was perfectly sure that I was responsible for the voices, and yet he came to me within the last hour and asked for my friendship. When James first suggested the invention of the voices and the use of the telephone, he said that there would be no risk, because the only man capable of detecting our scheme was Charlie Fenwick, out in Springfield.

"James did n't know you, but had heard of you. We did n't believe that you'd be called in on the case, and when you told me your real name over the telephone to-night I thought



I'd sink through the floor of my closet. I knew there was no use in bluffing. But you're not a terrifying criminologist, and I'll always think of you as a real nice boy. Good night."

He dropped her hand, and she slipped out of the room.

"This is serious, sir," pointed out Corson, addressing Willmer. "What action do you propose to take regarding this girl?"

"I don't know," confessed the financier brokenly. "Let me sleep on it. I shall certainly endeavor to get my money back, and will use my influence to prevent this mad marriage. Perhaps I can frighten her by pretending to turn her over to you, Corson."

"You would n't dare," declared Fenwick.

"Perhaps not," he admitted weakly. "It's sheer ingratitude, gentlemen! Think of the affection and care I have lavished upon Lorraine Carewe! I have indulged her every whim, and have denied her nothing. This is how I am repaid. It's bitter, gentlemen; it's bitter. She seems to have grown cold, to have lost all respect and feeling for me. The loss of the money which she has obtained by

fraud is as nothing compared to the realization of that fact."

Otis King, to the surprise of the others, laughed aloud.

"Stow it, sir," he advised. "That's hypocritical cant, and you know it!"

"What in hell do you mean?" blustered Willmer, his manner undergoing a complete change.

"You know damned well what I mean," answered King, coolly, arising. "Come along, Corson, and say good-by to Mr. Willmer. He won't want to see you again."

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE SMALLEST VOICE

**W**ILLMER displayed deep indignation as Corson and King left the room.

"I'll teach that young whipper-snapper his place," he threatened. "As if I'm going to be content to let the matter drop! I'll have her arrested, if need be. Think of the agony and suspense I've been through; think of the sleepless nights those voices have caused."

"Mr. Willmer," observed Charlie, "some years ago you obtained from Art Carewe certain options on a railroad right of way which he held. You convinced him that these options were valueless, but subsequently you realized a quarter of a million dollars on them. Art Carewe never obtained a penny from you in return. Just before his death you promised him that you would do the right thing by his daughter.

"She heard you, and believed with her dying father that you intended to recompense her

with a share of the money you had obtained through sharp practice. You had no such intention. You love money better than anything else in the world, and could never bring yourself to part with so gigantic a sum. So you brought Lorraine to live with you, adopted her as your legal ward, used her as a private secretary, and stifled her ambition to embark on a career. In the midst of luxury she was almost penniless. All the time you comforted yourself with the reflection that some day she would inherit most of your vast wealth, and the old score would be evened in that way. You wished and hoped for her marriage to Otis King, in order eventually to unite two huge fortunes."

"True enough," agreed Willmer. "What was the harm?"

"The harm lay in the fact that you refused the girl an opportunity for self-expression during the best years of her life. You made her a veritable poor little rich girl. Clothes she had in abundance, as well as food and shelter, but you could n't or would n't give her happiness. Acting upon the advice of the somewhat erratic chap who had won her affection, she fought you in the only way a



man of your stripe can be fought. She attacked your imagination, and did it successfully. The voices would not let you rest, night or day."

"Right," agreed Willmer. "Would you have me overlook that fact now?"

"You will overlook it," declared Fenwick. "You're bound to. You were n't frightened or tormented by those bizarre voices you heard over the telephone. They were not material agencies seeking to do you physical injury. There was only one Voice that bothered you, and that was here." Fenwick thumped his breast with clenched fist.

"It was a tiny voice, sir, but how clear! The still, strong voice of Conscience that makes cowards of us all. You heard it every time a telephone bell rang; you hear it now, and you'll never cease to hear it until you say to Lorraine Carewe: "Take the money, my child; it belongs to you. Forgive me!" "

Willmer was silent as Fenwick concluded, and did not stir. Charlie walked over to him and laid a persuading hand on his shoulder.

"Silence that voice, sir. You promised Art Carewe you'd do the right thing, and that's it. You don't need the money; you'll

never miss it. It may even teach you the joy and blessings of giving. Will you?"

Willmer arose, shaking Fenwick's hand aside. The action was unintentional, however, for in another second he had found it with his own and pressed it warmly.

"Fenwick," he promised, "I'll do it!" There were tears in his eyes.

"You'll never regret it, sir," assured Fenwick, consulting his watch. "Just eleven o'clock, and the mystery of the voices has been solved!"

"And Charlie Fenwick still remains the wizard of the wires!" Willmer turned to Seth, who had been mute throughout the interview. "You two will stay to-night, won't you?" he asked.

"I guess we'd better be leavin', sir," answered Boyden. "We ought to be doin' what the fellers did in the fourth chapter of Acts, twenty-third verse."

"What was that?" smiled Willmer, through his tears.

" 'They went to their own company and reported,' " quoted Seth.











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